

REBELLION, INVASION AND

OCCUPATION:

A MILITARY HISTORY OF IRELAND, 1793-1815

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Dedicated to Susanne, Seamus and Niamh



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Abstract

The history of Ireland is complex, and has been plagued with religious, political and military influences that have created divisions within its population. Ireland's experience throughout the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars highlighted and intensified such divisions that have influenced Irish society into the twenty-first century. This body of work is an analysis of the British army in Ireland during the period 1793 to 1815, which proved to be a critical era in British and Irish history. The consequences of the events and government policies of that time helped to determine the social and political divisions within Ireland for the following two centuries.

The intension of this thesis is to provide an analytical synthesis of the military history of Ireland during this time, focusing on the influences, experiences and reputations of the various elements that comprised the Irish military forces. This revisionist study provides an holistic approach by assessing the militia, yeomanry, fencible and regular regiments in relation to their intended purpose within Britain's strategy. By focussing on deployment, organization, performance, leadership and reputations, as well as political and military background, a number of perpetual misconceptions have been exposed, especially in relation to the negative historiography surrounding the Irish militia and yeomanry due to sectarian bias.

This work shows that Ireland became an important facet of the tactical and strategic thinking of both the French and British governments at this time, with Britain needing to defend the kingdom against any possible invasion to secure its own defence. This resulted in the British military occupation of a kingdom whose population had been polarised by civil rebellion, invasion and renewed religious bigotry. A close examination of the military history of the kingdom during these

crucial years provides a better understanding of how the Irish became, and remained, a socially and politically divided people, while being subjected to the political and military dominance of Britain.

Preface

In 2003 I enrolled at the University of Canterbury as a mature student to study for a degree in history. After eighteen years in the New Zealand Police, and with a young family, I considered it time that I re-evaluated my career options. I had always been a prolific reader of history and my thirst for historical knowledge remained unquenched, so undertaking a programme of formal study was the obvious option for me to take. During my undergraduate study I was fortunate enough to enrol in *Eighteenth-Century Rebellions in Britain*, a course taught by Professor John Cookson, which sadly, due to his later retirement, is no longer available to students. This course introduced me to the 1798 Irish Rebellion, a revolt which I had previously known very little about but which now intrigued me, especially due to my Irish ancestry. Thus, the decision to conduct a study of the military history of Ireland during the period of 1793-1815 for my Masters thesis proved a natural choice in that it combined my longstanding interests in military and Irish history.

In this thesis I have attempted to provide a balanced synthesis of the military history of Ireland during these turbulent times, by examining the various elements of the Irish military establishment, the roles they played and the events with which they were involved. What became very obvious early in my reading was that the Irish played a significant part in the defence of Britain, as well as their own country. Until recently, the traditional British bias towards the Irish has been responsible for the limited recognition of this, especially in regard to the Irish militia. Generally lacking the training, discipline and professional supervision of regular regiments, the militia provided the majority of troops who effectively contained and extinguished the rebellion prior to the bulk of the reinforcing British regiments arriving from Britain.

Admittedly, I found myself having some empathy with the plight of the militiamen in dealing with their fellow Irishmen, when reflecting on my own service as a policeman in my home-town of Westport, where on occasions I was required to act as an agent of the government in containing aggressive protests against unpopular government policies affecting the local economy.

My sincere thanks must go to John Cookson, whom I am heavily indebted to in regard to this work. It was he who initially suggested the topic to me and agreed to supervise me in this endeavour after he had already supervised my Honours dissertation. Not only has he provided me expert advice and guidance in ensuring that the thesis has developed from the raw draft initially presented to him, but he also provided me with his collection of primary source notes and microfilm that have proved invaluable. Although well-deserved, his retirement is a loss to the University of Canterbury and to future history students. I am also indebted to Graeme Dunstall, who as my senior supervisor provided sound guidance and critique that ensured the improved structure of the thesis. Thanks must also go to Judy Robertson, office administrator of the School of History, for her welcoming smile and helpful manner that has ensured my time studying history has remained hassle free. I would also like to acknowledge the dedication and professionalism of the other academic staff of the School of History who have provided me with enthusiasm and support throughout my time at Canterbury.

Undoubtedly, my greatest thanks must go to my wife, Susanne, whose love, support and sacrifice has ensured that I have been able to take my passion for history to another level. She encouraged me to follow my dream when others questioned my sanity in relinquishing 'a perfectly good salary' to lead the impoverished life of a student with a family. However, the student lifestyle has ensured that I have been able

to combine study with quality family time, with my children, Seamus and Niamh, unable to avoid being indoctrinated with my views of historical issues. Thus, it is to my family that I dedicate this work.

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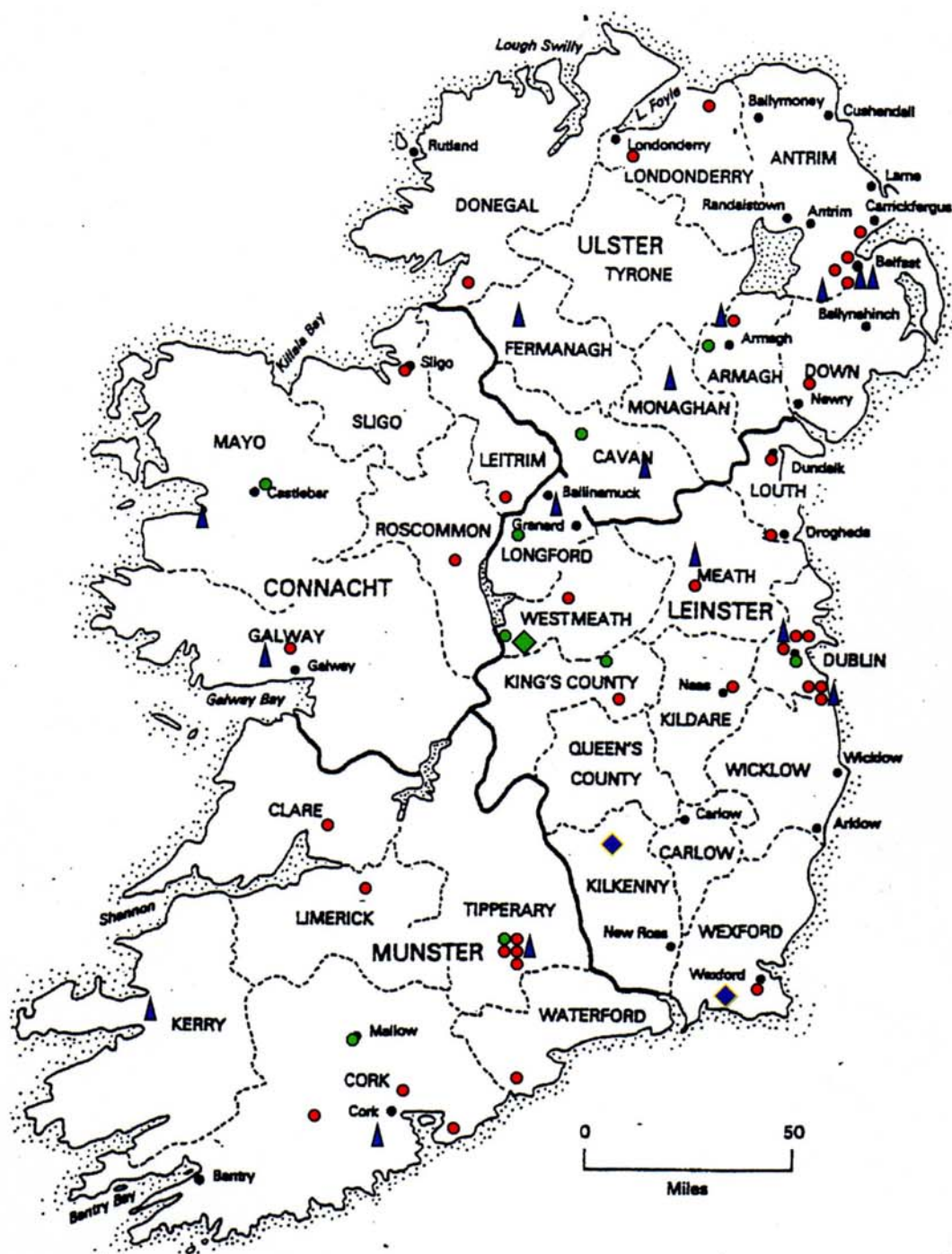


Map 1



Map 2

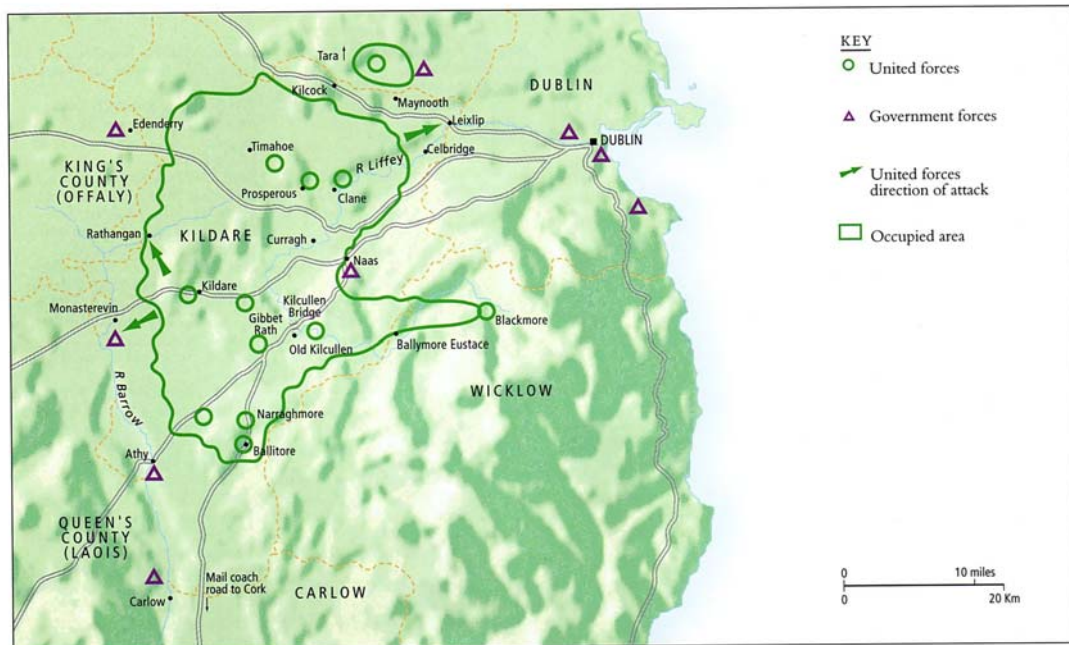
Proposed Distribution of the Irish Garrison, Summer 1796



Key:

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| ● Irish militia | ◆ Regular Foot | ◆ Irish fencible cavalry |
| ▲ British fencibles | ● Regular cavalry | |

Map 3



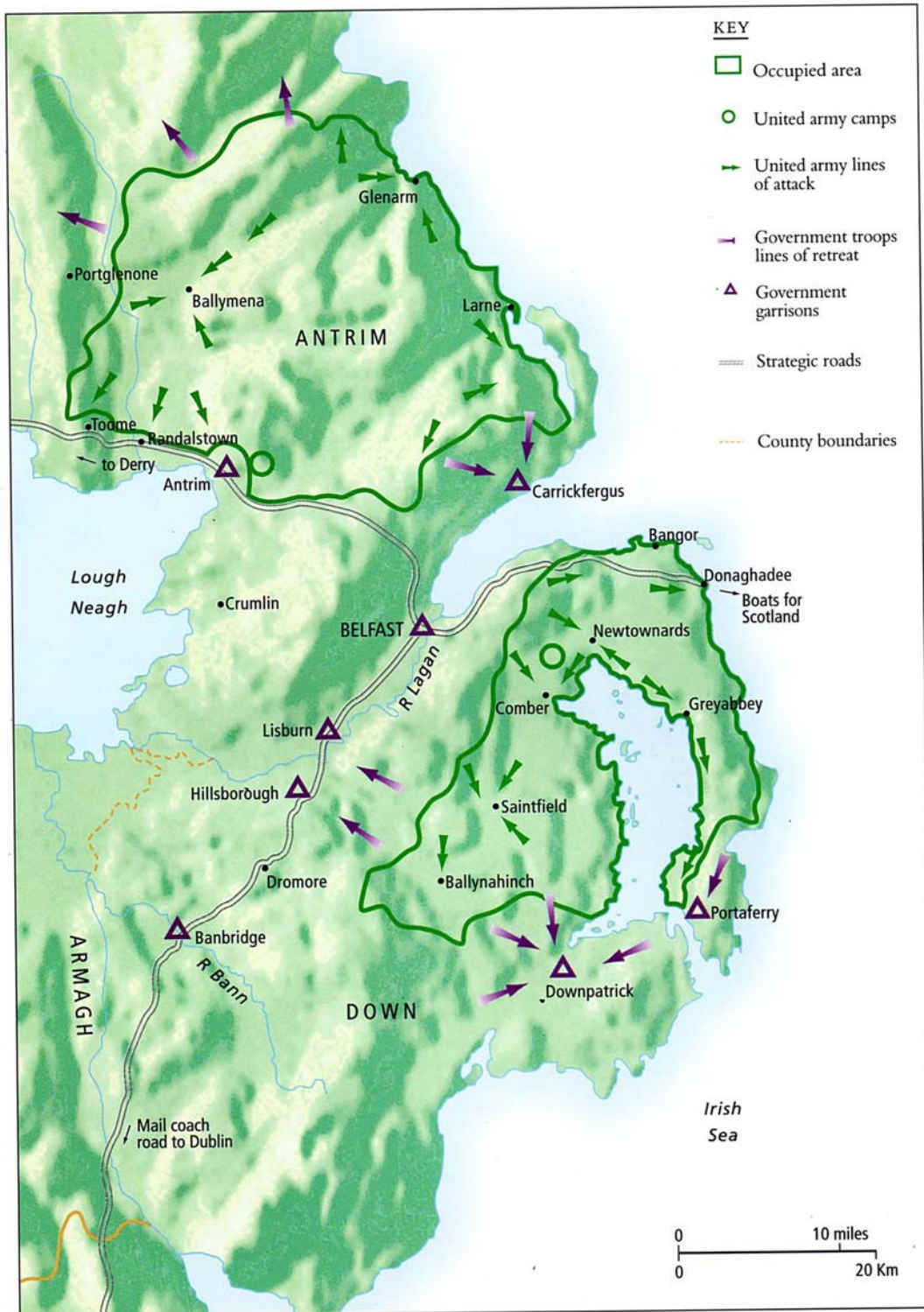
Map 4

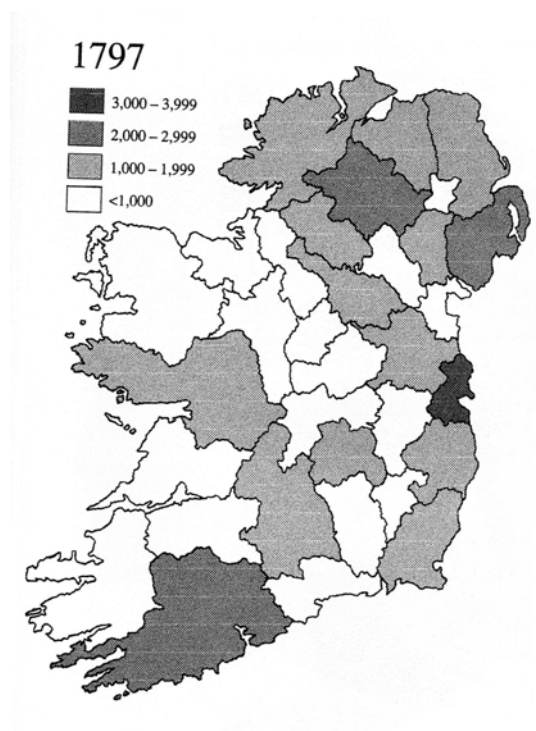
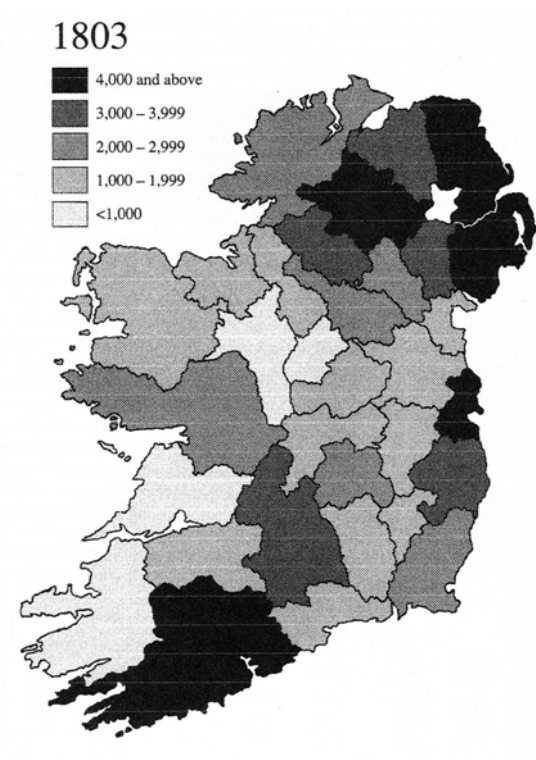


Map 5



Map 6



**Map 8****Map 9**

Chapter 1

An Introduction: the British military in Ireland in the eighteenth century-towards crisis.

The history of Ireland is colourful and complex, and has been plagued with religious, political and military influences that have created divisions within its population for nearly one thousand years. Ireland's experience throughout the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars highlighted and intensified such divisions that have influenced Irish society into the twenty-first century. The intention of this thesis is to provide an analytical synthesis of the military history of Ireland during this time, focusing on the influences, experiences and reputations of the various elements that comprised the forces in Ireland. To date only a small number of comprehensive academic studies have been made of the Irish establishment at this time, with only three comprehensive studies fully focussing on either the Irish militia or the Irish yeomanry. Although these studies have provided greater knowledge of these individual corps, they do not provide an overview of the Irish military experience during the period. Most work relating to this era in Ireland has focussed specifically on the rebellion and French invasion of 1798, but has failed to include the post-rebellion years that saw a massive increase in the numerical strength of the Irish military establishment which led effectively to the military occupation of the country. This revisionist study provides an holistic approach to promote a greater understanding and a more accurate account of the components that made up the armed forces in Ireland, their involvements in critical events, and of the influences and experiences that have shaped the historiography surrounding these corps. This has been done by identifying the critical factors that influenced the military experience in

Ireland and critically analysing the traditional views, some of which have been prejudiced by religious, racial and political bias.

The historiography surrounding the military history of Ireland during these years of conflict has been moulded by political motivation of nineteenth-century Ascendancy and British historians, such as Sir Richard Musgrave and Sir John Fortescue, and more recently in the twentieth-century by Irish academics, such as Allan Blackstock and Thomas Bartlett, encouraged by the strength of Irish national identity. Ascendancy-minded historians have focussed on the loyalty to the crown of the Protestant yeomanry, while vilifying the Catholic population and militia for being untrustworthy and infected by revolutionary fervour. Most nationalist historians have tended to portray the 1798 rebellion as a Catholic national uprising against an oppressive government, backed by a yeomanry corps intent on murdering Catholics, while marginalising the militia as nothing more than an oppressive element of the British army.¹ This thesis aims to provide a less partisan approach to the topic, fostering a more balanced view by exposing inconsistencies and evidence that have either purposely been ignored or have yet to be analysed. Essential records relating to the Irish yeomanry and militia were destroyed in the Four Courts fire during the Irish Civil War of 1921-1922, although sufficient data has been obtained from other primary sources that provides crucial evidence of individual corps, such as official returns submitted by the lords lieutenant of Ireland, located in the Home Office papers of the National Archives at Kew. Some reliance has been placed on the comprehensive studies of the Irish militia by Sir Henry McAnally and Ivan F. Nelson, as well as the studies on the Irish yeomanry by Allan Blackstock, as apart from these

¹ S.J. Connelly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, New edition (Oxford, 2004), p. 504

works, the only serious examinations of these organisations has been limited to a few academic journal articles.

An examination of the military history of Ireland during this period is fundamental in gaining an understanding of the complex nature of Irish society and the creation of two separate Irish nations. This body of work is a critical analysis of the British army in Ireland at the time which assesses the militia, yeomanry, fencible and regular regiments in relation to their intended purpose within Britain's strategy. By focussing on deployment, organization, performance, leadership and reputations, as well as political and military background, not only has a greater understanding of the military history of Ireland during this period been achieved, but also a number of perpetual misconceptions have been exposed, especially in relation to the negative historiography surrounding the Irish militia and yeomanry due to sectarian bias. This necessitated separate chapters for both organisations. A number of significant questions have remained unanswered by historians, which this thesis attempts to resolve by placing them into context with each other. Such questions include: How true was it that Ireland was considered too important to Britain for its defence to be left to the Irish?; How much conflict was there between the 'Hibernianization' of the armed forces of the British crown and continued rule in Ireland?; How well did the Irish militia and Irish yeomanry serve the purposes of the British government?; What conclusions can be deducted from the deployment patterns of the Irish units?; Was the Protestant Ascendancy correct in questioning the loyalty of the mainly Catholic militia?; What legacy did the British army leave Ireland as a result of military operations during the period? By addressing these questions it has become clear that Ireland and the Irish played a important role in the defence of Britain, which has been generally overlooked by British historians. What remains the most significant result of

the events of 1798 was the military occupation of the kingdom by Britain which was to last for more than a century.

The period of 1793 to 1815 was a critical era in British and Irish history. The consequences of the events and government policies of that time helped to determine the social and political divisions within Ireland for the following two centuries. A close examination of the military history of the kingdom during these crucial years provides a better understanding of how the Irish became, and remained, a socially and politically divided people, while being subjected to the political dominance of Britain. These years saw the rise in militant republicanism that was influenced by the ideology of the French Revolution and was popular amongst some factions of the middling classes. In response there was resurgence of militant Protestant loyalism that had initially evolved in the early 1780s. Revolutionary politics of the mainly Protestant middle-class, coupled with traditional agrarian grievances of the rural Catholic peasantry, led to the rise in internal violence and destruction of property.² Renewed war with its traditional foe, France, along with the need to counter increasing insurgent activities, forced Britain to augment its military forces in Ireland on an unprecedented scale. Ireland became an important facet of the tactical and strategic thinking of both the French and British governments at this time, with Britain needing to defend the kingdom against any possible invasion to secure its own defence, while France intended to capitalise on Irish unrest in an effort to distract British military resources from campaigns in the Caribbean and on the Continent.³ This resulted in the British military occupation of a kingdom whose population had been polarised by civil rebellion, invasion and renewed religious bigotry.

² Mike Cronin, *A History of Ireland* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2001), p. 105

³ Donald R. Come, 'French Threat to British Shores, 1793-1798,' *Military Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 4 (Winter, 1952), pp. 174-188

Ireland became a military and political enigma for Britain during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The essential defence of the kingdom created a number of dilemmas that compounded the manpower issues facing the British government in time of war. Compared to France, Britain's relatively small population ensured it had limited manpower resources for either defence or offensive operations. Heavily committed on the Continent and the West Indies, operational requirements forced the British army to transfer regular infantry regiments from the Irish establishment. In response, British Prime Minister, William Pitt, instigated the formation of the Irish militia to make use of the largely untapped Catholic male population that his government had recently permitted to bear arms in defence of their country. However, this caused conflict with the majority of the ruling Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland who feared the rise of the Catholic majority, claiming that they could not be trusted due to their traditional Jacobite sympathies and allegiances to the Pope and Catholic monarchy of France.⁴ The army also had to deal with the conflicting demands of counter-insurgency operations while having to deploy a sufficient force to meet any invasion. The events of 1798 illuminated the problems faced by the authorities in Dublin Castle who had to quell rebellion and defend against invasion, while attempting to temper factions of zealous Protestants whose continued violence towards the Catholic population promoted further internal unrest. This did not prove easy as the contradictory ideologies and tactics of the military high command promoted confusion and ill-discipline within the army, fostering further violence; Ascendancy-minded generals Carhampton and Lake encouraged counter-

⁴ J.E. Cookson, 'Arming Catholics: The Irish Militia, 1793-1815,' Unpublished paper presented at A.M.B.H.A. Conference, February 1995, p. 5

terror tactics, while generals Abercromby and Cornwallis favoured a more liberal and humane approach.⁵

The Protestant Ascendancy caused the greatest predicament for Britain in Ireland in the 1790s. The nationalistic fervour of the armed volunteers of the 1770s and 80s during a time of war with the American colonies and France had seen Britain relinquish legislative power to the Irish parliament in 1783. However, by the early 1790s the rise of the republican movement and its potential for Catholic emancipation led to the Ascendancy to seek the military support of Britain to maintain their control of the kingdom. This led to a change of direction for the Protestant minority who now saw closer ties to Britain as the only means to protect their interests. The Protestants focused on religion as a tie to Britain, openly displayed through the rise of the Orange orders that were incorporated into the yeomanry. It was such fervour that led Britain to reclaim political control of Ireland through the Act of Union in 1801. The chaos caused by constant civil unrest and the excessive violence against Catholics, encouraged by the Ascendancy, convinced liberals such as Pitt and Cornwallis that the only alternative was for Ireland to be incorporated into the United Kingdom.⁶ The military reverses of 1798 were unfairly blamed on the militia to hide the inadequacies of the high command and its policies, further promoting the mistrust of Catholics. This was endorsed by the Ascendancy who called for the augmentation of the predominantly Protestant yeomanry, which it claimed was the only national force that could effectively defend its and Britain's interests in Ireland.⁷ This resulted in the militia being marginalised to being seen as a source for regular recruits, with the Irish garrison being further reinforced by British fencibles and English militia.

⁵ Charles Ross (ed.), *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, vol. 2 (London, 1859), p. 355

⁶ Cronin, pp. 114-116

⁷ Allan Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army: The Irish Yeomanry, 1796-1834* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 289-290

The French revolutionary principles of ‘Liberty, equality and fraternity’ were popular within certain sectors of the Irish population in the 1790s and such philosophies helped to determine the crucial events of 1798. These principles were embraced by the Presbyterians of Ulster, whose religious beliefs were in line with the democratic doctrine and who hoped to gain the political power that was denied them as religious dissenters. Factions within the Irish peasantry also incorporated some of these principles with their separate agrarian issues, especially in County Armagh and the Ulster borderlands where violence became prevalent by 1796. Such principles also gained support to varying degrees from the four million disenfranchised Roman Catholics who, until 1793, could not buy or sell land, practice law, teach, enter university, vote or enter parliament, bear arms, or purchase commissions in the armed forces.⁸ Political agitation was fuelled by publications such as Tom Paine’s *The Rights of Man* and Wolfe Tone’s *An Argument on behalf of the Catholics in Ireland*, leading to the formation of new political societies.⁹ The ‘Society of United Irishmen’ campaigned for radical reform and the limitation of English influence in Ireland, while supporting the re-instatement of Catholics into Irish politics. Their ultimate aim was for total independence from Britain and the formation of a republic, although initially such policies were not publicised.¹⁰ Political tension grew within the kingdom, with the British prime minister, William Pitt, arguing that concessions needed to be made to Irish Catholics to counter revolutionary ideas, regardless of the position of the Irish parliament in Dublin.¹¹ This led to the removal of some of the Penal Laws in 1793 that had legally deprived Catholics of their civil rights for most of

⁸ Thomas Bartlett, ‘Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,’ in *A Military History of Ireland*, eds. Thomas Bartlett & Keith Jeffrey (Cambridge, 1996), p. 247

⁹ David Dickinson, Daire Keogh & Kevin Whelan (eds.), *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 256-258

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ivan F. Nelson, *The Irish Militia, 1797-1802: Ireland’s Forgotten Army* (Dublin, 2007), pp. 30-33

the eighteenth century. Other moves which proved unpopular with the Protestant Irish oligarchy included the disbandment of the old Volunteer movement and its replacement with a militia controlled by the government. Catholics were entitled to enlist in the militia, ensuring they were now armed, which led to protests from Protestant sectors and increased sectarian tension. Starting in County Armagh, clashes between Catholic 'Defenders' and Protestant 'Peep o' Day Boys' led to the formation of Loyal Orange societies that quickly became powerful elements within Irish society and were initially looked upon with some concern by the British authorities at Dublin Castle. However, by 1796 the government was more preoccupied with the suppression of the clandestine activities of the United Irish and the Defenders that were actively promoting rebellion.

The army in Ireland had dual tasks of maintaining the peace and defending the kingdom from invasion. Up until the 1790s this was successfully achieved by the small number of British regular regiments stationed there. However, war with France from 1793 created added pressure on the Irish military forces. The shortage of troops required to fight in overseas campaigns led to a rapid reduction in the number of regular infantrymen on the Irish establishment. The creation of the 38 militia regiments that year ensured the augmentation of the infantry component of the garrison at a time when internal security was seriously threatened, although the loyalty and competency of the predominantly Catholic and poorly trained militia was questioned by many.¹² When the United Irishman, Wolfe Tone fled from Ireland in 1795 he succeeded in persuading some of the French Directory that Ireland was a weak spot in Britain's defence system and that a French invasion would spark a mass popular uprising that would end British rule. By 1796 the Irish army was fully

¹² Ibid., pp. 15-16

stretched with few regular troops to provide a sufficient force to repel an invasion, while most of the militia regiments were dispersed into small detachments throughout the kingdom to counter insurgency.¹³ The fact that a large fleet carrying a sizable French army led by General Hoche had managed to evade the Royal Navy blockade and anchored in Bantry Bay in December 1796 proved that the security of Ireland was seriously under threat and emphasized the inadequacies of the government's defence strategy.

The threat of invasion accelerated the polarization of Irish society. The outlawed United Irishmen established an underground military organization and allied themselves with the Defenders in an effort to gain mass support from the Catholic peasantry. In response to demands from Protestant gentry for the means to defend themselves from insurgent activities, and as a safeguard against invasion and insurrection, a force of yeomanry was established that actively enlisted the vehemently Protestant Orangemen. Tension mounted with the introduction of the Insurrection Act of 1796 which enabled the lord lieutenant to proclaim certain areas to be 'in a state of disturbance.'¹⁴ This act allowed for searches, curfews, press-ganging of suspected insurgents, calling-out of the yeomanry and the quartering of soldiers in the homes of citizens without compensation. Such moves proved highly unpopular and led to excesses and acts of cruelty by government troops that went unpunished and fuelled resentment. As more areas were proclaimed to be in a state of disturbance and searches led to arrests and the seizure of weapons, pressure grew on the United Irish to act before their organization was too weak to be effective.¹⁵ Thus, in May

¹³ Earl of Camden to the duke of Portland, 19 March 1796 (National Archives, Home Office Papers, HO 100/60)

¹⁴ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' pp. 262-265

¹⁵ Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 65-66

1798 the long-awaited rebellion erupted without the support of a French invasion that was essential to give it any chance of success.

The 1798 uprising was a tragic episode in Irish history that had political and social ramifications for future generations of Irishmen. Massacre and atrocities were perpetrated by both government and rebel forces, each feeding on long-held hatred that was sponsored by religious bigotry. A bloodbath ensued in the few counties where the rebels succeeded in gaining active popular support, especially in Meath, Kildare, Wicklow and Wexford, with the hated yeomanry and hundreds of innocent Protestant civilians being targeted by Protestant and Catholic insurgents.¹⁶ The rebels fought bravely, and though poorly armed and ill-organised, initially inflicted some reverses on detachments of government troops that mainly consisted of militia and yeomanry. However, once the government forces were concentrated into sizable bodies the rebel armies were contained and quickly defeated. Due to the lack of experienced leadership and significant active popular support within the United Irish movement in Dublin and its surrounding counties, the rebel forces in Meath and Kildare lacked direction and soon after the outbreak of the uprising lost the initiative and were either captured, surrendered or were mercilessly killed by government forces. It was only in County Wexford, where the combination of a number of factors ensured the rebellion gained significant popular support. Recent counter-insurgent operations, combined with the limited number of troops stationed in the county and economic hardship had inspired a number of Protestant gentry, as well as the Catholic peasantry, to rise against the government.¹⁷ The county was quickly captured by the

¹⁶ Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty: The bloody story of the great Irish Rebellion of 1798* (London, 1972), pp. 132-140

¹⁷ Daniel Gahan, 'The Rebellion of 1798 in South Leinster,' in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, ed. Thomas Bartlett, et.al. (Dublin, 2003), pp. 109-111

rebels and a short-lived republic was established that seriously threatened the internal security of the kingdom.

However, all attempts to expand the republic into neighbouring counties were defeated. The United Irish suffered heavy reverses at Arklow and New Ross, losing the military initiative. Lacking essential military experience within the senior leadership, the rebel forces remained disorganised and eventually concentrated at Vinegar Hill, near Enniscorthy, where they were easily defeated by a number of converging government columns. The rebel army was dispersed, with hundreds being slaughtered in the rout, including women and children.¹⁸ And although a small number escaped into the Wicklow Mountains to continue guerrilla-style operations up until 1803, the uprising had been effectively dealt with. The failed rebellions in Ulster in June 1798 proved even less successful for the United Irish movement and were decisively extinguished within two weeks. Government counter-insurgent operations in the province had successfully weakened the revolutionary organisation that ensured that the risings in counties Antrim and Down were uncoordinated and lacked experienced leadership.¹⁹ As with the uprising in Dublin, government spies had successfully penetrated the rebel movement ensuring that military forces could be mobilized to counter insurgent activity.

The subsequent French invasion in August the same year came too late to aid the rebel cause. After landing on the coast of county Mayo, the small force of 1,100 men led by General Humbert, captured the town of Castlebar and established a republic.²⁰ The defeat and ignominious rout of the government troops, known as the 'Castlebar Races,' became a stain on the reputation of the British army for which the blame was placed unfairly on the Irish militia. However, the outnumbered and

¹⁸ James Hewitt (ed.), *Eye-witnesses to Ireland in Revolt* (Reading, Berkshire, 1974), p. 92

¹⁹ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 281

²⁰ Richard Hayes, *The Last Invasion of Ireland* (Dublin, 1979), pp. 140-146

isolated French column was eventually surrounded and forced to surrender at Ballinamuck, County Longford, on 8 September after Humbert had attempted to march on Dublin to release imprisoned rebel leaders. The invasion failed to inspire the mass popular support that the exiled United Irishmen, such as Wolfe Tone and Napper Tandy, had promised. And although there were minor risings in counties Longford and Westmeath, where rebels had hoped to link up with the French force, the insurgents were easily defeated by government troops. At Granard, County Westmeath, an ill-conceived and disorganised attack on the garrison was dispersed, while at Wilson's Hospital in County Longford, an estimated 200 rebels were slaughtered in the hospital grounds after they had negotiated to surrender.²¹ Some United Irishmen from these defeated groups did manage to join the French only to be killed at Ballinamuck. The massacre of five hundred of rebels who were forced to flee after the French had surrendered was followed by the summary execution of the majority of the 90 insurgents who were captured.²² Further atrocities were committed by government troops in mopping-up operations in the recapture of Killala in County Mayo.²³ And although the rebellion was over, reprisals continued that ensured further unnecessary deaths that fostered permanent division between the Protestant Ascendancy and the Catholic majority.

Despite the repression of the rebellion, military resources in Ireland had been severely tested. The continued demand for regular troops to be taken from the Irish establishment ensured that Dublin Castle accepted the offer of English militia regiments to serve in Ireland, alongside the numerous English and Scottish fencibles units that remained in the kingdom until their disbandment in 1802. Exaggerated and

²¹ Pakenham, pp. 370-372

²² Ibid.

²³ Harman Murtagh, 'General Humbert's Futile Campaign,' in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, eds. Thomas Bartlett, et.al (Dublin, 2003), p. 186

politically motivated reports concerning the undisciplined behaviour of the 'Catholic' Irish militia regiments during the events of 1798 promoted a reputation of untrustworthiness that was to affect the components of the Irish garrison in the post-rebellion years.²⁴ The uprisings were portrayed by the Ascendancy as a Catholic rebellion set on the removal of the Protestant oligarchy.²⁵ Therefore, the predominantly Catholic militia could no longer be fully trusted in the defence of the kingdom, ensuring that greater reliance was now placed on the yeomanry to provide internal security. Loyalism was now rampant within the Protestant population, including the Presbyterians of Ulster, leading to a massive augmentation of the yeomanry that eventually saw membership exceeding 80,000.²⁶ This was more than four times that of the militia which had been restricted by law not to exceed more than 25,000 men.²⁷ The militia became an embarrassment to the government and, apart from a few 'Protestant' regiments together with the ad-hoc elite light company battalions who were considered worthy enough to be incorporated into the army reserve, the majority of the militia regiments were relegated to secondary roles of garrison duty in Ireland and England. In effect, the Irish establishment became a Protestant army of occupation with the marginalisation of the militia, the expansion of the yeomanry and the increased number of British auxiliary troops in Ireland.

Nevertheless, Ireland continued to provide a flood of recruits to the militia and regular regiments, despite the events of 1798. At a time when enlistment in the army was entirely voluntary, there was a steady flow of Irish Catholics recruited into the British army throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. However, by comparing the rapid expansion of the yeomanry to the estimated Protestant male

²⁴ Nelson, pp. 228-229

²⁵ A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Summer Soldiers: The 1798 Rebellion in Antrim and Down* (Belfast, 1995), p. 40

²⁶ Allan Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 12

²⁷ Nelson, pp. 45-46

population at the time, it is clear that Protestant Irishmen generally preferred to defend their interests in Ireland rather than serve overseas.²⁸ It appears that such trends may have been encouraged by the government to ensure internal security by legally removing thousands of potentially volatile military-age Catholics from the kingdom while increasing the number of armed loyal Protestants. An examination of Home Office archives indicates that regiments sent to recruit in Ireland post-1798 were stationed in counties with high Catholic populations, with few being posted in Ulster where the concentration of the Protestant population and yeomanry corps was greatest.²⁹ However, it could also be argued that these regiments were simply posted to locations that provided the greatest number of recruits in the shortest time, and no doubt this must have been a consideration of Horse Guards with the constant demand for troops during the period. Ultimately, Irishmen, whether Protestant or Catholic, enlisted for self-interest. Protestants joined the yeomanry to protect family and property, while the Catholic peasantry generally enlisted to provide an income for their families in a time of economic hardship. Whatever the motivation, the Irish proved to be reliable soldiers and an essential element of the British army both in home defence and overseas operations.

The historiography surrounding the Irish establishment during the period has been influenced by political intrigue and religious intolerance. This is most evident in the lasting reputations of the militia and yeomanry where the ‘Catholic’ militia became synonymous with ill-discipline, disaffection and disloyalty, while the ‘Protestant’ yeomanry established a reputation for loyalty and reliability. Such attitudes were promoted by contemporary Ascendant politicians and historians, such as Sir Richard Musgrave, who played on the fears of Catholic domination in Ireland

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 114-115

²⁹ Circular from Adjutant General’s office, 23 January 1800 (National Archives, HO 100/90)

to secure their own interests through British military support. Exaggeration of massacres became the orthodoxy of a reinvigorated conservative Protestantism in Britain and Ireland with the publication of Musgrave's memoirs in 1801 which further fuelled the underlying fear of slaughter by Catholics that had remained in Protestant psyche from the stories of the massacre of Protestants in 1641 during the English Civil War and the Williamite War of the early 1690s.³⁰ By focusing on atrocities committed by the Catholic rebels against Protestants during the uprisings and emphasizing the perceived poor performance of the militia, these zealous loyalists intended to prove that the Irish Catholic population could not be trusted and were not deserving of emancipation. Thus by depriving the Catholic majority of any political power, the Protestant minority could maintain control of the kingdom. Irish Catholics had traditionally supported the Jacobite cause and their supply of recruits to the Irish Brigade of the French army throughout the eighteenth century was seen as proof of disloyalty to the Hanoverian regime. Such strategies proved fruitful in preventing emancipation for a time and secured the military dominance of Britain over Ireland through to the early twentieth century. However, it was not until the late twentieth century that in-depth study has revealed a less partial account of the era.

The lack of regimental returns that has survived regarding the Irish militia and yeomanry has limited the accuracy that can be established regarding these organisations. However, there is a wealth of other primary source material that ensures a sound appreciation of the military establishment, issues, strategies and operations in Ireland in the 1790s and early 1800s. Home Office Papers (100 series relating to correspondence between the lords lieutenant of Ireland and the Home Secretary) at the National Archives in Kew provide evidence of the official decisions

³⁰ James Kelly, 'We were all to have been massacred: Irish Protestants and the experience of the rebellion,' in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, eds. Thomas Bartlett & Keith Jeffrey (Dublin, 2003), pp. 312-315

and opinions of the governing authorities at the time. The official returns submitted by the lord lieutenants of Ireland contained in these papers are invaluable in confirming the official strengths of the Irish establishment throughout the period, as well as providing crucial information regarding the stationing of each corps. They prove to be essential in providing data as to when and what British units were transferred to Ireland. Examination of these records clearly prove that Ireland was an essential recruiting ground for Britain and that contrary to Ascendancy propaganda, Irish Catholics were considered sufficiently loyal enough to fight for a Protestant king. The official correspondence of Charles, the Marquis Cornwallis, provides evidence of the difficulties facing the British government in dealing with the complexities of Ireland at this time, as well as the thoughts of those who pushed for union with Britain. The Kilmainham Papers, relating to the administration of the Irish military establishment, and the Rebellion Papers, a collection of personal correspondence relating to the 1798 uprising, held in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin, also provide an insight into the views, attitudes and experiences of individuals within organisations that influenced the period.

The rise of interest in Irish history in the late twentieth century has ensured that there is a wealth of secondary sources to aid this study. Although published in 1949, Sir Henry McNally's book, *The Irish Militia, 1793-1816*, provides the most comprehensive study of the Irish militia. This has been complemented by Ivan F. Nelson who provides a more analytical approach to the early years of the militia in *The Irish Militia, 1793-1802: Ireland's Forgotten Army*, published in 2007. Both authors challenge the traditional poor reputation of the militia and provide sufficient evidence to substantiate their arguments which are supported in this thesis. *An Ascendancy Army: The Irish Yeomanry, 1796-1834*, by Allan Blackstock remains the

most comprehensive study of the yeomanry to date and has proved invaluable in providing sources and data relating to the controversial corps. Thomas Pakenham's *The Year of Liberty: The bloody story of the great Irish Rebellion of 1798*, remains the most comprehensive narrative history of the rebellion, with the bibliography providing a rich source of primary material. Thomas Bartlett's *A Military History of Ireland* provided an initial overview of the complexities of the Irish military forces during the period, while J.E. Cookson's *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815* proved essential in gaining a thorough understanding of the significant part Ireland played in the defence of Britain. The periodical of the Military History Society of Ireland, *The Irish Sword*, proved a lucrative source of academic articles surrounding Irish military issues of the era, while K.P. Ferguson's PhD. thesis from Trinity College, Dublin, 'The army in Ireland from the restoration to the act of Union,' also provided essential data.

The thesis has been divided into chapters that emphasize that during this era, the military forces in Ireland largely served British interests in the kingdom. Few historians have reached this conclusion, with the exception of John Cookson in *The British Armed Nation*, because they have only examined individual elements within the Irish establishment without considering a broader context. The minor exception to this conclusion was the yeomanry which, although officially under the control of the government at Dublin Castle, seemed to have had some autonomy in that it was localised and its use was dictated by the interests of the local gentry. Chapter Two relates to the formation and distribution of the militia prior to the rebellion, and emphasises that though predominantly Catholic in composition, the militia was a truly national force through its inclusion of Protestants. The militia proved essential in the defeat of the uprising and a study of experiences leading up to the rebellion provides a

greater understanding of why the regiments performed as they did. The following chapter focuses on the yeomanry and how and why it came into being. The yeomanry proved essential in the British defence strategy in that it provided localised protection and intelligence which the regular army was unable to offer, while allowing the concentration of troop for counter-invasion operations. Chapter four explains the composition and management of the Irish establishment leading up to 1798 and is essential in understanding the changes that took place in the post-rebellion era which are examined in Chapter six. The events and experiences of the rebellion and French invasion are covered in Chapter Five. These events and the aftermath need to be closely examined and understood in an effort to achieve a less biased and non-partisan view of the whole period which seems to have been lacking amongst British and Irish historians of the two centuries since.

Arguably, 1798 proved a watershed in Irish history and has differing significance within factions of Irish society. The events of this period have been coloured not only by nineteenth century Ascendant historians who have emphasized the negative aspects of Catholic participation and largely downplayed or simply ignored the unfavourable features of Protestant involvement, but also by Catholic memorialization of 1798 fostered by the rise in Irish nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By closely examining the relevant available primary source material a more enlightened view and a better understanding of the military organisations and of those who influenced them in Ireland during the period can be obtained. In doing so it has become clear how the religious bigotry and division in Irish society plagued the country for so long. A closer study reveals serious flaws in the traditional historiography surrounding the military history of Ireland in this era,

especially in regard to the militia, that needs to be exposed to ensure a more balanced reputation and history.

Chapter 2

The militia

The conventional view of the Irish militia is of an ill-disciplined and poorly trained Catholic corps that had been infiltrated by the United Irishmen, was subject to subversion, and thus could not be trusted in the defence of Ireland.³¹ This view was reinforced by exaggerated, and sometimes false, reports concerning negative behaviour of individual militia regiments during the rebellion and French invasion of 1798. This chapter exposes some of the myths and inaccuracies that have stained the reputation of the corps, but also provides an understanding as to how and why some of these have developed. Political expediency, religious bias, mistrust and fear of the Catholic peasant majority by the Protestant minority can account for the unfavourable attitudes towards the militia. This has been perpetuated by Sir Henry McNally, who provided the first comprehensive study of the Irish militia but failed to provide a complete analysis of the corps performance during the uprising. However, there is clear evidence that contrary to such adverse views, in general, the militia played a significant role in the defence of the kingdom, either in dealing with rebels during the rebellion or by providing thousands of semi-training recruits to regular British regiments. This study goes beyond that of Ivan Nelson, whose work on the militia only covers the years 1793 to 1802, by examining its role and influence to the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. This is crucial in exposing the importance of the corps in the broader defence of Britain.

The arming of the Irish population through the formation of the militia and yeomanry was a necessary consequence of war with Revolutionary France. The

³¹ Steven W. Myers & Delores E. McKnight (eds.) *Sir Richard Musgrave's Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion of 1798*, 4th ed. (Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1995), pp. i-iv

demand for service of regular army regiments outside the British Isles led to a massive reduction of the Irish establishment and posed a serious threat to Britain's defence system. When war was first declared in 1793 the Irish establishment, then consisting of 11,094 regular troops, was well under strength from the 15,000 men set by the British government in 1769.³² However, this number was further reduced to less than 4,000, with battalions being required for campaigns in Flanders and the West Indies.³³ Securing Ireland from external invasion and internal rebellion was necessary for maintaining Britain's defence system and a substantial military force was needed to ensure this. An immediate solution was found in the posting of English and Scottish fencibles to Ireland from 1794, as only a few regiments of the newly established Irish militia were operational at the beginning of that year and the Irish-recruited regular regiments were being immediately shipped out of the kingdom once they had reached full strength.³⁴ At this time it was considered that the raising of the militia, and the later yeomanry, from within the local population would provide the necessary manpower for a substantial garrison that was not available from Britain. However, the creation of these forces, the way they were employed and the reputations that they acquired during this turbulent period were to have a dramatic effect on the future political and social development of Ireland.

The Militia Act of 1793 provided Ireland with a citizen army for its defence. A similar act had been introduced to Ireland in 1778 during the American War of Independence but had never been enforced. What had subverted the formation of an Irish militia during this time was the creation of patriotic volunteers into independent armed associations from 1776 until 1793. These formations were independent of any formal government control, with the politically ambitious and democratically elected

³² Nelson, p. 13

³³ Earl of Westmorland to Sir Henry Dundas, 25 September, 1793 (National Archives, HO 100/40)

³⁴ Ibid.

leadership of landed gentry and middle-class professionals, supported by the rank and file, eventually gaining substantial political influence that assisted Ireland in gaining full legislative independence in 1782.³⁵ This ensured that the volunteer movement became a subject of suspicion that posed a threat to British influence in Ireland. The earl of Rutland claimed that it was ‘impossible to bring them under subordination’ and that there was a need to restore ‘the sword to the executive.’³⁶ The creation of the militia was seen by the administration at Dublin Castle as an opportunity to remove this threat, as well as the threat of increased rural disturbances created through the rise of Catholic Defenderism, by providing a government-controlled armed force for internal security. In December 1792 the earl of Westmorland, then the lord lieutenant of Ireland, wrote to the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, stating that the Irish cabinet had decided that it was now essential to form a militia in an effort to put down the volunteering spirit.³⁷ Once the Militia Act was introduced and the militia regiments embodied, the numerous volunteer corps were forced to disband through a proclamation by the lord lieutenant.

The Irish militia was a subject of controversy from its inauguration. The Militia Act authorised the formation of 38 single battalion regiments to be established from each county as well as from a small number of cities, such as Dublin, Limerick and Cork.³⁸ In 1793 many members of the Irish Ascendancy, including the lord lieutenant of Ireland at that time, the earl of Westmorland, insisted that only Protestants be recruited into the militia. They argued that Catholic loyalty could not be trusted and that only a Protestant militia could restore the confidence of the Irish

³⁵ Marianne Elliott, ‘Ireland’, in *Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution*, eds. Otto Dann & J.R. Dinwiddy (London, 1988), pp. 71-86

³⁶ Sir Henry McAnally, *The Irish Militia 1793-1816: A Social and Military History* (London, 1949), p.

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³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10

³⁸ *Ibid.*

and British governments.³⁹ However, Pitt and Dundas disagreed. They argued that the creation of the militia provided an opportunity to establish a regulated instrument of government that would defend against anarchy and misrule in Ireland. They stated that by promoting the formation of a militia that included Catholics, they were advancing the interests of Protestant Ireland and the Empire as a whole, in that by ‘conciliating the Catholics as much as possible’ it would make them an effectual body of support.⁴⁰ Others supported their stance, with Lord Darnley stating in the Irish House of Lords in January 1793, that the militia must not be exclusive to Protestants as this would only promote ‘bad blood.’⁴¹ Thus, when the Militia Act was passed into law by the Irish parliament in early 1793, enlistment into the regiments was open to both Protestants and Catholics. Only Lord Kingsborough, the commanding officer of the North Cork Militia, openly encouraged Protestant enlistment into his regiment by promising land allotments to non-Catholic recruits at the end of their service.⁴²

The command structure of the Irish militia was predominantly Protestant. Initially, in February 1793 a militia force of 16,000 was proposed, with a qualification of income of £2,000 per annum for commanding officers ensuring only landed magnates became colonels.⁴³ This ensured that the majority of regiments would be led by Protestants, with very few Catholic nobles having sufficient funds to qualify. This in turn led to the majority of junior officers also being of the Protestant faith, gaining their commissions through patronage. This system of acquiring positions by taking advantage of family and local connections was the accepted practice within British and Irish military and political spheres during this period, providing structures of

³⁹ Bartlett, ‘Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803’, p. 253

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ McAnally, p. 58

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 18

loyalty that fostered stability.⁴⁴ However, although this restricted the number of Catholic officers in the Irish militia, the same system also led to some Catholic gentry, who were tenants of the landed magnates, being offered commissions either by the very few Catholic colonels or by liberal-minded Protestant commanding officers. An example of this was Lord Fingal, who as head of the Catholic branch of the influential Plunkett family, rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel of the Meath Militia in 1797 after he had been offered a captaincy in the same regiment in 1793.⁴⁵

In contrast to the officer corps, the rank and file of the militia was predominantly Roman Catholic. In the 1790s Catholics accounted for approximately 75 per cent of the population of Ireland and clearly without their enlistment into the regiments, only the units raised in Protestant Ulster would have been able to achieve their effective strength. The enlistment of Catholics was actively encouraged by the government, being made possible by the Catholic Relief Acts of 1792-93. These removed restrictions on Catholics holding firearms and from entering the army and holding commissions. This was a total reversal of previous government policy, although Irish Catholics had been unofficially recruited into the British army since the Seven Years War in the 1750s.⁴⁶ The heavy demand on manpower on the small British army during the American War of Independence from 1775 to 1783 had led to constant recruiting in Ireland, where the legislation preventing the enlistment of Catholics was pragmatically ignored. During the 18th century it was customary for recruits to enlist for life service, only being released from the army due to medical disengagement through illness, age or wounds.⁴⁷ This meant that by the time the

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 58-60

⁴⁵ Nelson, p. 65

⁴⁶ Stuart Reid, *King George's Army 1740-1793: Infantry* (London, 1995), pp. 19-20

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Relief Acts were introduced in the early 1790s, thousands of Irish Catholics had already proved their loyalty through service in the British army.

The demographics of the Irish population influenced the identity of each militia regiment. The majority of records pertaining to the individual regiments were destroyed during the Irish Civil War of 1921-1922. However, by examining other relevant contemporary documentation such as official government correspondence, journals, newspapers and personal memoirs, it is possible to get a clear picture of how the regiments were formed and of the reaction to the raising of the militia. In 1793 Ireland was divided into 32 administrative counties, varying in population size and religious persuasion. Catholics made up the majority of people in most counties, with only the bulk of the population of the counties in Ulster being Protestant.⁴⁸ But there was further division amongst the Protestant population, with the majority of the population of several counties in Ulster being Presbyterian. This was reflected in the composition of the rank and file of the militia regiments.

Ivan Nelson, in his recent book *The Irish Militia, 1793-1802*, argues that due to there being no record of the religion of individual militiamen in enrolment books, pay records or muster rolls, without further evidence it remains conjecture that the county regiments reflected the religious make-up of their county of origin.⁴⁹ However, he has used the contemporary evidence collated by Edward Wakefield, in his book *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political* published in 1812, in an attempt to estimate the proportion of Catholics to Protestants in the Irish militia. Wakefield's data was compiled from interviews with various regimental commanders and from records concerning the composition of the 30 militia light companies that were brought together as composite battalions in 1802 at a brigade summer training

⁴⁸ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 255

⁴⁹ Nelson, p. 124

camp at Athlone.⁵⁰ Although Nelson argues that this evidence must be treated with care due to some of it being based on hearsay, it is the only contemporary evidence available. He concludes that contrary to the previously accepted historiography surrounding the religious composition of the militia rank and file, proportionally more Protestants enlisted than Catholics.⁵¹ He has come to this conclusion by comparing the estimated proportion of the Catholic and Protestant population of 17 counties to the proportion of Catholics and Protestants in the rank and file of the respective county militias. In almost every case the ratio of enlisted Protestants far exceeds the proportion of the Protestant population for the counties (Table 2.1).⁵² However, the accuracy of such statistics will always remain in question as the only available official evidence of the Protestant: Catholic county population ratio was provided from the Hearth Tax survey of the 1730s which does not take into consideration the rapid population increase of Catholic peasantry during the late eighteenth century.

<i>Regiment</i>	<i>Militia Proportion</i>	<i>County Proportion</i>
Carlow	5:2	9:1
Cork County	7:2	11:1
Fermanagh	2:13	2:1
Galway	5:1	39:1
Kerry	5:1	79:1
Kilkenny	7:1	22:1
King's County	6:1	7:1
Leitrim	2:1	29:1
Limerick County	14:1	79:1
Louth	5:4	14:1
Monaghan	3:4	4:1
Roscommon	7:1	79:1
Tipperary	19:1	11:1
Sligo	2:1	30:1
Westmeath	2:1	29:1
Wexford	2:1	9:1

Table 2.1 - Proportion of Catholics to Protestant in the Irish militia
(Source: Nelson, *The Irish Militia, 1793-1802*, p. 124)

⁵⁰ Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political*, vol. 2 (London, 1812), pp. 630-631

⁵¹ Nelson, p. 124

⁵² Ibid.

The most extreme example is County Fermanagh which had a civilian population ratio of two Catholics for every one Protestant. However, this was not reflected in the county militia which had a ratio of 2 Catholics to 13 Protestants.⁵³ It could be argued that the small proportion of Catholics could be explained by Fermanagh being a border county where traditional agrarian disturbances and strong links to Defenderism dissuaded the Catholic peasantry from joining what may have been seen as the military arm of the Protestant oligarchy. However, an examination of predominantly Catholic counties throughout Ireland, and excluding those in Ulster, supports Nelson's claim. County Kerry had a population ratio of 79 Catholics to 1 Protestant, but the county militia ratio was only 5:1. County Louth had a Catholic population majority of 14:1, but a militia ratio of only five Catholics for every four Protestants. Only County Tipperary went against this trend having a militia ratio of 19:1 compared to a civilian population ratio of 11:1.⁵⁴

It is impossible to get an exact proportion of Catholic militiamen compared to Protestants or their distribution amongst the regiments. The light company returns submitted from the battalions formed for summer camp training, and used by Wakefield, are the only known official records to provide the relevant information (Table 2.2). However, J.E. Cookson concludes that this evidence suggests that only two thirds of the total militia rank and file were Catholic.⁵⁵ He argues that possibly 15 out of the 38 regiments included one third or more enlisted Protestants, but that official information concerning the religious make-up of the battalions was not published due to the government concern for the deepening sectarian bitterness.⁵⁶ The Irish administration at Dublin Castle was hopeful that the militia would be seen as a

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Cookson, 'Arming Catholics: The Irish Militia, 1793-1815' (Unpublished article, presented at AMBHA Conference, February 1995), p. 4

⁵⁶ Ibid.

national defence force, free from religious labelling. However, from the time of its establishment, the Irish militia was dismissed by the Protestant Ascendancy as being hostile to the Protestant population, mainly due to the perceived proportion of Catholic militiamen.⁵⁷ Historians generally agree with the estimation that Catholics provided two-thirds to three-quarters of the total militia rank and file during its existence.⁵⁸ This then indicates that Protestants made up a substantial percentage of enlisted militiamen, negating the historical perception that the Irish militia was exclusively a Catholic institution. However, the militia remained predominantly Catholic in the rank and file, which was unprecedented in eighteenth century Ireland.

<i>Regiment</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Percentage Catholic</i>
Cork City	95	1	
Galway	97	2	
Carlow	78	4	
Longford	90	6	
Waterford	89	6	
Clare	91	7	
Limerick County	89	7	
Limerick City	84	7	
Meath	90	9	
Kildare	91	9	
Westmeath	85	10	
Kerry	83	13	
Tipperary	85	15	
Dublin City	84	16	
Roscommon	82	16	
North Cork	81	18	
Louth	72	25	
Queen's County	73	26	
South Cork	73	26	
Tyrone	58	29	
Londonderry	55	45	
Sligo	48	42	
Leitrim	50	50	
North Down	44	51	
Wicklow	44	54	
Armagh	26	69	
Fermanagh	24	76	
Monaghan	18	82	
South Down	13	87	
Cavan	5	95	
Total	1,997	903	68.8

Table 2.2 - Irish Militia, 1802: Catholic and Protestant rank and file, Light Infantry Brigade

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 5

⁵⁸ Nelson, p. 21

(Source: Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political*, vol. 2, pp. 630-631)

The balloting system used to raise the militia proved contentious and unpopular as it saw the introduction of compulsory conscription in an era when service in the army had been traditionally voluntary. To meet the emergency response of raising an establishment of 16,000 men for the new militia, each parish within the counties was to provide a list of names of all eligible males between 18 and 45, with professions or occupations to be included.⁵⁹ Names were then drawn from a ballot by a local magistrate to ensure each parish provided the required number of recruits allocated to serve in the county regiment. However, in some areas this system was extremely unpopular and resulted in rioting. Throughout March, April, May and June of 1793, more than 230 people were killed in protests against the embodiment of the militia that occurred across the county.⁶⁰ This was five times the number of casualties sustained than in the previous 30 years of agrarian disturbances, but considerably less than the fatalities recorded concerning protests against raising militia in England.⁶¹ Rioting was particularly prevalent in counties that had a strong United Irish presence, such as those of eastern Ulster and border counties such as Armagh and Monaghan. Riots in other counties, such as Roscommon, were not only aimed at the ballot system but were also stimulated by traditional agrarian complaints regarding church tithes and rents.⁶² Although initially successful in quickly raising the required numbers for some county militia regiments, the ballot system was eventually abandoned due to a combination of its unpopularity, that it was considered slow, expensive and inefficient, and that it had been made redundant by the number of volunteers.⁶³

⁵⁹ McAnally, p. 29

⁶⁰ Thomas Bartlett, 'An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793', *Past and Present*, No. 99 (May 1983), pp. 41-64

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Nelson, p. 60

⁶³ Ibid., p. 68

Some historical claims surrounding difficulties in raising the militia regiments have been exaggerated. The population of some counties peacefully accepted the ballot system, with 17 out of the 32 counties having no reported riots or incidents.⁶⁴ Numerous counties were able to dispense with balloting altogether due to the number of men who voluntarily enlisted. Examples include the County Kerry and City of Limerick militias that were able to raise their full complements in one day, solely from volunteers.⁶⁵ Others such as the Queen's County regiment took only ten days. It could be argued that the large number of volunteers was due to a number of benefits and the comparatively good wages paid to the rank and file once it had been determined that militia would remain on permanent duty, effectively making the militiamen full-time soldiers. One incentive for recruits was the limited enlistment period of four years, with the right of re-enlistment once the period had expired.⁶⁶ Ivan Nelson argues that the majority of the militiamen were either labourers or tradesmen. He concludes that this shows that those skilled recruits from cities and provincial towns tended to be Protestant, while those unskilled labourers from rural areas tended to be Catholic, and that many saw the militia as providing a regular income in times of economic depression.⁶⁷ This view has some substance when considering the high proportion of unskilled and semi-skilled married recruits who would have been attracted by regular full-time pay, extra allowances for wives and children under ten years old, promotion, and in the early 1790s, no risk on service outside Ireland.⁶⁸ One notable benefit was provision for children of militiamen to attend school at a time of high illiteracy and no formal state-funded education system. Nelson bases this claim on evidence obtained from the Carlow Militia enrolment

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 63

⁶⁵ McAnally, p. 40

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Nelson, p. 129

⁶⁸ Ibid.

book, the only known complete surviving contemporary record of militia enlistment in the 1790s. However, although this data provides an insight into the composition of one individual regiment, any general conclusions must be treated with caution due to a lack of similar records to compare it to when considering there were 38 battalions of Irish militia.

Regimental establishments varied in size when they were first raised in 1793. Lord Hillsborough, the chief designer of the bill put to the Irish House of Commons, suggested an initial total strength of 16,000 militiamen, based on 500 men per county.⁶⁹ The total number of troops initially raised, excluding officers and non-commissioned officers, was 14,948.⁷⁰ The ability to raise troops was determined by regional economic, political and religious influences, as well as the reaction of the local population to the ballot system and proposed conditions of service. Lord Hillsborough's 'Royal Downshire Regiment' had the largest complement with a strength of 770 rank and file divided into 12 companies.⁷¹ Tipperary, Wexford, Galway, Donegal, Londonderry and Tyrone all had strengths of 560 men distributed into ten companies, while most other county militia varied between 300 to 500 men in 5 to 8 companies.⁷² The smallest unit was that of the Drogheda Militia which had only 183 militiamen formed into three companies.⁷³ The total number of troops within the Irish militia fluctuated from year to year due to medical discharges, desertions, deaths and availability of recruits. In February 1795, Earl Fitzwilliam, the lord lieutenant of Ireland at the time, reported that the militia amounted to 13,366 rank and

⁶⁹ Andrew Martin, 'Reform and Change Within the Irish Army and Military System, 1763-1818' (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Canterbury, 1990), p. 104

⁷⁰ McAnally, p. 24

⁷¹ Nelson, p. 46

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

file.⁷⁴ The same year authorisation was given for militia companies to be augmented from fifty to seventy men, as it was considered easier to find recruits for the militia than regular regiments.⁷⁵ From that time there was a steady increase fostered by a wealth of volunteers and substitutes, ensuring that by January 1798 the militia consisted of 22,728 men.⁷⁶ The size of the militia was significant in that when the rebellion broke out in May of the same year, the militia constituted 64 percent of the total military forces available in Ireland.⁷⁷

Initially, the Militia Act empowered the governors of each county to call out the militia once a year for 28 days of training in times of peace.⁷⁸ However, the increase in violence throughout the kingdom, accompanied by the constant threat of invasion through war with republican France and the upsurge in the volunteer movement, posed a serious risk to the internal and external security of the nation. This resulted in heated debate within the Irish parliament as to the proposed length of embodiment after the cabinet had already authorised expenditure for 12 months wages for each regiment.⁷⁹ This then led to the lord lieutenant in the summer of 1793 directing that the Irish militia be placed on permanent service for the duration of the war with France. Although this contradicted the terms in which the recruits were enlisted, resulting in some desertions, there appears to have been no serious protest from the rank and file. What concerns the men did have were mainly in regard to the initial lack of provisions made for their families. However, such anxiety soon dissipated once allowances, pensions, and schools were provided by government funding for dependents of all militiamen on permanent service and serving outside

⁷⁴ Earl Fitzwilliam to the duke of Portland, February 1795 (National Archives, HO 100/53)

⁷⁵ McAnally, p. 73

⁷⁶ Nelson, p. 248

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 46

⁷⁹ McAnally, p. 53

their home county.⁸⁰ In effect, permanent service was welcomed by many of the rank and file as it provided clothing, food, accommodation and regular pay in a time of economic uncertainty.

The reputation and performance of the militia officer corps proved controversial. Most criticism came from experienced senior regular army officers such as Lieutenant General Sir Ralph Abercromby and Lieutenant General Charles, Marquis Cornwallis, who were highly critical of the lack of leadership within the militia during 1797 and 1798. As commander-in-chief of the army in Ireland from late 1797 until April 1798, Abercromby used his criticism of the militia to highlight the flaws of the strategic policy that had been implemented. He argued that its dispersal into small detachments throughout the countryside to guard against insurgency hindered training and supervision by officers, thus reducing discipline and morale.⁸¹ Subsequent to a general inspection of the army conducted throughout Ireland in December 1797, he described the militia as 'licentious' and was critical of the lack of professionalism and responsibility displayed within the officer corps.⁸² He found that many militia officers were absent from their commands, preferring to maintain their social lives by residing in cities and provincial centres. In a private letter to the duke of Portland in June 1798 when the government forces had successfully contained the uprising, Cornwallis expressed his disgust at the cruelty shown by officers of the Irish militia and yeomanry: 'It shall be one of my first objects to soften the ferocity of our troops, which I am afraid, in the Irish corps at least, is not confined to the private soldiers'.⁸³ A month later, when post-rebellion clean-up was in full swing, he reinforced his feelings in a letter to Major General Ross when he stated, 'The Irish

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 266-267

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 116

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ross, pp. 354-355

Militia with few officers, and those chiefly of the worst kind, follow closely on the heels of the yeomanry in murder and every kind of atrocity'.⁸⁴

Regular officers constantly criticized their colleagues in the militia. An example is Colonel Robert Craufurd, who was later to gain fame leading the Light Brigade of infantry in the Peninsula war, claiming that the Irish militia officers were nothing more than brutes and uneducated farmers' sons.⁸⁵ Some criticism came from within the militia itself with Colonel Charles Vallancey, commander of the Tyrone Militia, complaining that his junior officers were self-indulgent and had no sense of duty to the regiment or their men.⁸⁶ Even after their involvement in extinguishing the rebellion and defeating the French, Lord Castlereagh, secretary to Cornwallis and a previous militia officer himself, wrote in September 1798 that the militia was commanded by 'bad officers' who perpetually solicited leave of absence and that they had 'a total ignorance and inexperience of every military duty beyond that of a common parade'.⁸⁷ It was statements such as these, made by respected military authorities, which reinforced the perpetual stigma that was attached to the militia and its officer corps.

However, the alleged general reputation of the leadership within the militia must be seen in its context. There is more than sufficient evidence to prove that as a whole the officer corps of the militia was not of the professional standard of the regular army. In reality it could not be expected to achieve that level. The militia by definition was a military force of trained civilians to be used in times of emergency. The only officers required to have previous military service were the regimental adjutants, ensuring that many unsuitable officers were offered commissions purely on

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 368-369

⁸⁵ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803', p. 258

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ross, p. 406

their financial qualifications.⁸⁸ Most of the peers and the middle-class gentry, who made up the majority of the officer corps, also had civil duties as county governors, magistrates and land magnates. Examples were Lord Abercorn of the Tyrone Militia, Lord Portarlington of the Queen's County Militia, and the duke of Leinster in the Kildare Militia, who gained their appointments as colonels due to their local influence and loyalty to the government.⁸⁹ Having dual responsibilities led to many being absent from their units for long periods of time, especially when required to attend county assizes.⁹⁰ Admittedly, many officers would have used such occasions as excuses to escape the boredom of military life in unfavourable rural and provincial locations. This is evident in the correspondence received by the lord lieutenant from disgruntled regimental commanders seeking permission to replace officers who had continually refused to return to their units.⁹¹

The absence of officers from regiments had a detrimental effect on training for both officers and the rank and file. Nelson argues that there is an obvious link between the criticism of the quality of the officers and the ill-discipline of the men.⁹² In the 18th century officers in the British army learned their profession through studying the numerous manuals written for junior officers, guidance from experienced colleagues, by being provided drill lessons from senior non-commissioned officers and through experience in times of war.⁹³ The ability of many officers to gain leave to foster their civilian interests ensured that they and their men did not achieve the level of professionalism expected by the Irish administration. However, much of the blame for this state of affairs lay with the colonels of the regiments. All leave was given at

⁸⁸ McAnally, p. 21

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 88-91

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Lord Carhampton to the earl of Camden, 19 October 1797 (National Archives, HO 100/68)

⁹² Nelson, p. 25

⁹³ J.A. Houlding, *Fit For Service: the training of the British army, 1717-1795* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 45-57

the discretion of the colonel, with each battalion officially required to have one field officer (major, lieutenant colonel or colonel) and two thirds of all other officers present with the regiment at all times.⁹⁴ In reality, leave tended to be given indiscriminately. The absence of many officers then led to much of the individual, platoon and battalion drill and tactical training being conducted by the non-commissioned officers, such as sergeant-majors and sergeants.⁹⁵ This was especially so when the battalions were broken up into small sections and platoons to be stationed in small hamlets.

Detached service also proved damaging to the effectiveness of the militia and it is surprising that the semi-trained regiments performed as well as they did during the uprising and French invasion. It not only hindered essential large formation training which was required to be effective in linear-style actions against regular troops, but also proved difficult in establishing and maintaining regimental discipline and morale.⁹⁶ This came about through lack of officer supervision when battalions were broken up into company, platoon and squad size detachments that were commanded by either inexperienced junior officers or NCOs.⁹⁷ Small squads were posted in villages and hamlets to protect individuals and property, negating any form of battalion or platoon training that was essential to effectively perform the linear tactics of the British army during the period.⁹⁸ An example was the Downshire Militia which in 1796 had its headquarters at Drogheda, while one of its companies was stationed at Navan and another at Bilgriggan. However, smaller detachments of the regiment were stationed at Swords, Rateath, Lusk, Malahide, Dunshaglin, Westpanstown, Collon, Torkphecklan, Slane and Parsonstown; six being commanded

⁹⁴ Nelson, p. 108

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 24

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 137

⁹⁸ Stuart Reid, *British Redcoat 1740-1793* (London, 1996), pp. 24-26

by a subaltern, while the rest by a sergeant.⁹⁹ Morale and discipline suffered due to exposure to corruption, drunkenness and constant use in unpopular policing duties in assisting magistrates against the local population among whom the militiamen had to reside.¹⁰⁰ Regiments were restricted from being stationed within the same localities from which they recruited because it was felt that possible family connections and local sympathies would affect unit discipline. It was such postings, together with the shock of military life that initially led to a significant number of desertions within regiments. Within the first six months of service the County Wexford regiment lost 27 out of a complement of 207, the Downshire regiment lost 14 from 649, County Meath lost 45 from 298, and the City of Dublin regiment lost 33 out of 291.¹⁰¹ Such desertions became less frequent once conditions for the troops improved, such as provisions for wives and children to live within barracks and the establishment of battalion schools.

Much of the indiscipline shown by the militia was officially encouraged. In March 1793, General Richard Whyte urged his troops to rampage through Belfast, attacking homes and businesses of known radicals.¹⁰² The 1795 pacification of Connacht by Lord Carhampton, the commander-in-chief of the army in Ireland at the time, also aided the breakdown in discipline with those militia units involved. This came about through rising unrest and the inadequacy of the magistrates to deal with the disaffected population. On 17 May a proclamation was issued authorising the military to act in dispersing unlawful assemblies without the need to wait for the direction of a magistrate, although they could not act on their own accord if a

⁹⁹ McAnally, p. 88

¹⁰⁰ Nelson, p. 137

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 73

¹⁰² Thomas Bartlett, 'Indiscipline and disaffection in the armed forces of Ireland in the 1790s,' in *Radicals, Rebels and Establishments*, ed. Patrick J. Corish (Belfast, 1985), p. 118

magistrate was present.¹⁰³ The proclamation order was signed by seven privy councillors who were all colonels of militia regiments.¹⁰⁴ Continuous searches of civilian property, floggings, numerous house burnings and the illegal sending of suspected Defenders and United Irishmen to serve in the Royal Navy without trial were characteristics of this campaign as well as similar operations in Ulster later that year.¹⁰⁵ Thomas Pelham, the lord lieutenant's chief secretary at the time defended such practice and praised the conduct of the militia: 'It cannot be denied that some things were done that are to be regretted, but at the same time I believe no army ever behaved better under similar circumstances and I venture to say no army was ever placed in exactly the same situation.'¹⁰⁶ Thomas Bartlett argues that the illegal operations carried out under veiled approval from the government were linked to the indiscipline of the militia regiments involved.¹⁰⁷ He claims that the dispersal of battalions and the blurring of vital distinctions between civil and military authority could only add confusion and lack of restraint to troops who were not properly trained in such use. Even the severest critic of the Irish army, General Sir Ralph Abercromby, admitted that some of its indiscipline stemmed from the situation in Ireland: 'the dispersed state of the troops is really ruinous to the service. The best regiments in Europe could not stand such usage.'¹⁰⁸

To remedy the effects of detached service, summer training camps were established in 1795 where a number of battalions could come together. These camps, situated at Ardfinnan, near Clonmel in County Tipperary, Blaris, near Belfast and

¹⁰³ General Order, 18 May 1797 (National Library of Ireland, Kilmainham Papers 1013/352), quoted in Nelson, p. 137

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Bartlett, 'Indiscipline and disaffection in the armed forces of Ireland in the 1790s,' p. 118

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Pelham to the Home Secretary, July 1797 (National Archives, HO 100/70)

¹⁰⁷ Bartlett, 'Indiscipline and disaffection in the armed forces of Ireland in the 1790s,' p. 119

¹⁰⁸ James Abercromby, *Lieutenant General Sir Ralph Abercromby: a memoir by his son* (Edinburgh, 1861), p. 86

Loughlinstown, near Dublin, provided opportunities for company, battalion and brigade level training in firing and marching that were essential in forging the militia into an effective military force. Although initially established as temporary encampments for the summer months, they eventually became permanent camps with huts being erected for the troops. In the first year of their operation the Kildare, Clare, Donegal, Limerick City and Wexford militias were ordered to remain at Loughlinstown over the winter, while the Carlow, Wicklow and Kerry regiments remained at Blaris.¹⁰⁹ The traditional dispersal of the regiments had led to a decline in regulation dress, parade drill and arms exercise, due in part to the boredom and negligence of many officers.¹¹⁰ It was proposed that a rotational system of postings to the above camps would increase the standards within the militia regiments. However, it appears that these camps were not used to their full potential. The lack of contemporary documentation relating to training at the camps makes it difficult to ascertain an accurate record of what regiments attended these camps as well as what training they received. By examining the very few relevant sources available, such as official returns and reports from newspapers such as the *Dublin Journal*, Nelson has calculated that only 27 out of the 38 militia regiments trained together between 1795 and 1797.¹¹¹ He claims that no regiment attended the camps in all three years, as was initially intended, and that only the Clare, Donegal, Wexford, Armagh, Westmeath, Limerick City and Cavan militias had attended twice. He further states that there were a decreasing number of units available to attend summer training, with 21 in 1795, ten in 1796 and only three in 1797.¹¹² These figures clearly demonstrate how the

¹⁰⁹ Nelson, p. 82

¹¹⁰ Houlding, pp. 45-57

¹¹¹ Nelson, pp. 82-83

¹¹² Ibid.

dispersal of the regiments throughout the country was ruinous to the proficiency of the corps.

In general, the initial stationing of the militia regiments between 1794 and 1798 appeared to be free from any official system of religious bias. Once the regiments had been fully embodied they were marched from their counties of origin, only to return when being disbanded in 1802 and again in 1816. A system of annual rotation was introduced which saw most battalions serving at various locations throughout the kingdom. This was proposed to counteract any unwanted sympathies and relationships that the militiamen may have developed for and with the local population that were deemed detrimental to the policing duties required of the militias.¹¹³ In practice the regiments were posted to places far from their county of origin as it was thought that discipline would improve and training would be more efficient with the officers and men away from their home influences.¹¹⁴ This is evident when examining the militia return for March 1796 which showed the Kerry Militia stationed at Newry in County Down, the Derry Militia at Limerick, the Fermanagh Militia at Waterford and the North Cork Militia at Sligo.¹¹⁵ The only exception to this was the Royal Downshire Militia, recruited from the large Presbyterian population of County Down in Ulster, which appeared to have been permanently stationed at Drogheda. One explanation for this could be the strength of the United Irish in this part of Ulster whose large Presbyterian population were considered dissenters from the Anglican Church and mistrusted by the Irish Ascendancy. By stationing this unit at Drogheda, situated half way between the army reserves at Blaris, near Belfast, and Dublin, the government would have been able to react quickly with superior forces should the regiment mutiny. Sir Henry McAnally

¹¹³ McAnally, p. 62

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Camden to the duke of Portland, 21 March 1796 (National Archives, HO 100/60)

argues that the quartering of the regiments changed so frequently to prevent attachments occurring that the militia developed into a nomadic force.¹¹⁶

An exact account relating to the annual stationing of the militias is impossible to collate due to most records having been destroyed. However, the few surviving regimental annual returns provide some indication of how the units were distributed. In March 1796, Camden wrote to the duke of Portland with his proposed changes to the Irish garrison for the summer of that year. He sought authority from the Home Secretary to establish permanent camps to help formulate a defensive strategy against foreign invasion.¹¹⁷ By 1796 British intervention in Europe against France had failed ensuring that the British Isles were now a likely target of French attack. Camden's letter shows that the majority of the Irish militia was to be dispersed as individual battalions throughout the 32 counties, with ten regiments to be concentrated at training camps at Ardfinnan (County Tipperary), Laughlinstown (County Dublin) and Blaris (County Antrim).¹¹⁸ These camps were established not only to provide opportunities for battalion and brigade formation training, but also provided concentrations of ready reserves against rebellion or any invasion attempts.¹¹⁹ An examination of the regiments selected for the various camps indicates a balance between battalions with Catholic and Protestant rank and file majorities. The force to be stationed at Blaris in Ulster consisted of two 'Catholic' units, the City of Limerick and Queen's County militias, which were accompanied by three 'Protestant' regiments, the Cavan Militia together with the Fife and York Fencibles. At Laughlinstown the 'Catholic' Clare Militia was to serve with the Kildare and Donegal militias, which both had a sizable minority of Protestant militiamen. Whilst the force

¹¹⁶ McAnally, p. 62

¹¹⁷ Camden to Portland, 21 March 1796 (HO 100/60)

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

at Ardfinnan consisting mainly of 'Protestant' units, the Antrim and Armagh militias, was balanced by the presence of the 'Catholic' Wexford Militia and the Louth Militia that had a large minority of Catholic troops.¹²⁰ However, the lack of available regular army units and the desperate need to police the rural heartland of Ireland, as well as the strategic ports of Dublin, Cork and Belfast, ensured that the government was initially forced to rely upon the loyalty of the 'Catholic' militia regiments in assisting in the national security.

The militia lacked the required effective training to raise it to the level of the regular army. In contrast to the regular regiments, when first raised the militia battalions generally lacked a cadre of experienced officers and non-commissioned officers to provide drills and experience. Heavy reliance was placed on the few who had previous military experience to forge the officers and rank and file into a disciplined and effective unit.¹²¹ Some regiments resorted to recruiting retired English NCOs to provide the necessary experience.¹²² The few diligent officers who remained with their regiments were required to study the new drill manual written by Colonel David Dundas in 1793 to become proficient with the current military standards. It took time for the rank and file to adjust to the rigours of military life, with discipline instilled only after months of constant marching and musket drill. Failure of the government to initially supply accoutrements and weapons led to some units, such as the Kerry Militia, parading and training without muskets for a number of months.¹²³ However, by early 1794 all but the Cavan and Kildare Militias had reached their required strengths and were deemed proficient enough for service at a minimum level

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ McAnally, p. 55-56

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

required for internal security.¹²⁴ In a dispatch to London in January 1794, the lord lieutenant, the earl of Westmorland reported that ‘the militia are about 10,000 strong and are becoming fit for garrison duty and purposes of police but could not well be relied on against a disciplined enemy without the intermixture and aid of a body of regulars.’¹²⁵ It was clear that as a force the militia was not capable of defending Ireland against an invasion by regular troops.

Yet, in contrast to its poor reputation, the Irish Militia was effective in providing internal security. The large number of battalions ensured that the rural and isolated regions of the kingdom could now be policed against the rising incidents of violence. This had not previously been possible due to the few remaining available regular troops being required to guard strategic points such as Dublin and Cork. General Dalrymple, commanding in Belfast, reported in September 1795 that in service against Defenders ‘In all the circumstances that have yet occurred the behaviour of the regiments of militia has been excellent...the conduct...has been firm and obedient and that of good soldiers.’¹²⁶ Camden had previously made his favourable opinion of the militia known when he reported in May of the same year that ‘on all occasions that militia have behaved with the greatest spirit and showed the most loyal attachment to his majesty’s government.’¹²⁷

The most notable incident where the militia proved effective prior to the 1798 rebellion was in the quelling of the mutinies of regular battalions in Cork and Dublin in 1795. At Cork the Louth, King’s County, Meath and Roscommon Militias displayed discipline and loyalty when they assisted the 32nd Foot and the 7th Dragoon Guards in subduing the mutineers of the 105th and 113th Foot who were protesting

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Earl of Westmorland to the duke of Portland, 14 January 1794 (National Archives, HO 100/47)

¹²⁶ McAnally, p. 84

¹²⁷ Ibid.

against being posted to the Caribbean. In Dublin the Westmeath, Londonderry and Longford Militias combined with the Essex and Breadalbane Fencibles in suppressing the 104th and 111th Foot who had mutinied for the same reason.¹²⁸ In reporting on these incidents and other operations against rural insurgents, Camden stated that ‘The militia are the finest troops it is possible to see and have universally behaved well.’¹²⁹ While this comment may be an exaggeration stimulated by exuberance and relief in eliminating potential threats to Camden’s administration, the militia had proven itself to have developed into a reliable and effective auxiliary force. This in part could be attributed to the increased supervision and leadership provided by the augmentation of the militia in 1795, which led to an increase in the NCO to men ratio to 1 to 5.¹³⁰ This was much higher than the NCO: private ratio of the regular regiments. Clearly, contrary to the post-rebellion reputation of the Irish militia, a number of regiments had proven themselves to be loyal and disciplined, qualities that would be reinforced in 1798.

¹²⁸ Nelson, p. 156

¹²⁹ Camden to the duke of Portland, 24 July 1795 (National Archives, HO 100/58)

¹³⁰ ‘Return for Strength of Army and Militia in Ireland,’ 1 March, 1795 (National Archives, HO 100/50)

Chapter 3

The yeomanry

The Irish yeomanry remains a contentious subject within Ireland. Historical memories of oppression and atrocities by the corps against the United Irish rebels and the Catholic peasantry which were fostered by Irish nationalists in the nineteenth century have been continued through to the twenty-first century.¹³¹ However, in Ulster, where the yeomanry were most prevalent, the organisation is seen positively as an expression of loyalism to the British crown, although its initial purpose was to serve the interests of both Protestant and Catholic gentry and the middle-classes.¹³² The perception that the yeomanry provided the armed strength of the Protestant Ascendancy that was determined to maintain power through the domination of the Catholic majority has, until recently, ensured the unpopularity of the organisation amongst Irish nationalist historians. Allan Blackstock's book *An Ascendancy Army: The Irish Yeomanry 1796-1834*, remains the only comprehensive study of the corps and this chapter relies heavily on data provided from this source to evaluate the Irish yeomanry in the broader context of military history of Ireland during this period. What is evident is that the yeomanry was not only the physical embodiment of the Ascendancy, but that it proved to be an essential political tool in achieving increased military support from Britain, ensuring the maintenance of Ascendancy power in Ireland until the early twentieth century. Contrary to the views of some nationalist historians, the yeomanry corps were not a tool of British oppression, but became one of Protestant Irish oppression over the Catholic peasantry. The British government never fully trusted the Ascendancy and ultimately, it was the armed strength of the

¹³¹ Connelly, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, p. 633

¹³² Ibid.

yeomanry and the potential threat it posed to stability in the kingdom that ensured Britain increased its military presence in Ireland.

The formation of the Irish yeomanry in 1796 marked the second phase in the official arming of the Irish population. This force came about through the increasing political and sectarian disturbances that had occurred in Ulster and the bordering counties of Ulster, Leinster and Connacht during that year. Escalating violence in rural areas led to the demand for effective protection for individuals and property from the propertied classes that included the gentry, farmers, landowners and merchants.¹³³ Heightened support for the formation of localised armed forces eventually led to official recognition of the many defence associations that had already mushroomed in the troubled areas. The establishment of the yeomanry was also perceived at this time as being of significant strategic value in that it would free the militia from many civil duties so that it could be more effectively used in counter-invasion operations.¹³⁴ Although the yeomanry was predominantly Protestant, and in later years became the military arm of the Protestant Irish Ascendancy, many Catholics enlisted in the corps, with some gaining commissions.¹³⁵ However, the events of 1798 led to a greater polarization of the Irish population, with the increased distrust of Catholics leading to most being purged from the yeomanry. It was the hardening of attitudes and ill-discipline of many troops within the para-military organization that tarnished the reputation of the corps.

The yeomanry was founded on a tradition of duty in self defence. The majority of yeomanry corps were established in Ulster where the Protestant population had relied on voluntary military service since the founding of the Elizabethan plantations

¹³³ R.G. Morton, 'The Rise of the Yeomanry,' *The Irish Sword*, vol. 8 (1967), pp. 58-64

¹³⁴ Earl of Camden to the duke of Portland, 22 September 1796 (National Archives, HO 100/61)

¹³⁵ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 60

in the 16th century to provide the necessary protection from Catholic aggression.¹³⁶

The collusion of the militant United Irishmen and the Catholic Defenders in the mid 1790s led to increased fears throughout Protestant society and a call for greater measures to ensure the safety of lives and property. Anxiety was increased through comments recorded from Protestant leaders such as Lord Clare who feared of the repeat of the massacres committed by Catholics in 1641.¹³⁷ Localised armed associations began to be formed based around already established Protestant groups known as Boyne societies, such as the 'Apprentice Boys' and various other 'Orange' factions.¹³⁸ These initially functioned as social organisations. However, by 1795 the ability of Protestants to lawfully carry arms saw many of these factions coming together to provide armed security to their communities which the army was unable to provide.

The need to provide public safety inspired the establishment of the corps. As tension increased rural gentry and merchants increasingly became targets of the disaffected. Defenders and United Irishmen carried out raids on the houses of the landed classes in an effort to seize firearms necessary for rebellion. Such raids led to numerous deaths and destruction of property. Due to the isolated locations of many of the houses, the response from the military stationed in provincial towns was inadequate, resulting in calls for the creation of official localised bodies of volunteers to counter such activities.¹³⁹ The gentry began to lobby for government support in such measures, which were initially rejected. Although such calls received considerable positive response in the Irish Houses of Commons and Lords, the British

¹³⁶ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 267

¹³⁷ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 42

¹³⁸ Morton, 'The Rise of the Yeomanry,' pp. 58-64

¹³⁹ Ibid.

and Irish administrations quashed such initiatives, fearing the power any such organization may hold over the government.

The experience of dealing with the Irish Volunteers initially hindered the introduction of the yeomanry. The Irish Volunteers were established in 1778 and existed until the organisation was outlawed by the Irish government in 1793. Although the movement was established during the American War of Independence primarily to provide an auxiliary force for the defence of Ireland from potential French and Spanish invasion, it eventually became a strong political force. At its peak in 1782, it could boast 89,000 members and was influential in promoting the re-establishment of the Irish parliament that year, as well as gaining more favourable trade concessions from Britain.¹⁴⁰ The Volunteers became the strongest expression of Protestant defence tradition and could not be controlled by the government. As the movement was based purely on volunteers, received no pay from the government and had not been formed through any legislative power, the authorities had no control over delegating commissions for officers or the distribution of arms. Ironically, it was the legislation that allowed Protestants to bear arms that allowed the Volunteers to develop into a strong armed movement and powerful political force that was considered a destabilizing faction by the British government. Many feared that the creation of the yeomanry would lead to a similar situation.

Although the establishment of the yeomanry eventually proved to be a decisive move in aiding political stability in Ireland, the authorities in Dublin Castle initially viewed any sort of volunteering as a destabilizing influence. They saw the rise of the independent armed associations as a potential threat and feared armed

¹⁴⁰ Allan Blackstock, 'The Irish Yeomanry and the 1798 Rebellion,' in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, eds. Thomas Bartlett (et. al) (Dublin, 2003), p. 332

power in the localities in case it formed into radical political opposition.¹⁴¹ To counteract this, it was argued that such groups could be controlled by drafting them into a government-established yeomanry. Through this process, the Irish government could offer commissions to those it considered loyal to the regime and control them through pay and patronage. Lord Fitzwilliam, the liberal lord-lieutenant in Ireland in 1795, argued for the formation of a yeomanry that would include Catholics: 'We must endeavour to form a strength upon the principle of the English Yeomanry which will have the double effect of a defence against an invasion and an additional power in support of the magistracy.'¹⁴² He proposed that the yeomanry would include the better sorts of people whose social status fell between the landlords and the peasantry, which would include Catholic gentry, except in Ulster.¹⁴³ However, this proposal proved contentious in that it was seen by the Ascendancy as being revolutionary by placing power in the hands of Catholics and was one of the concerns that eventually led to Fitzwilliam's recall.¹⁴⁴

The Irish Yeomanry came into being in 1796, based on a plan proposed by Thomas Knox of Dungannon, an MP for Tyrone. In February of that year a number of armed Protestant and district defence associations were formed amongst the tenants of County Tyrone, pledging assistance to local magistrates in enforcing the law. The idea spread with numerous associations being formed in the other border counties of Ulster. By June 1796, the Dungannon Association had formulated a plan that was submitted to Dublin Castle by Knox. The plan called for a gentry-sponsored law and order association which would include reliable inhabitants signing loyal resolutions

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Fitzwilliam to the duke of Portland, 10 January 1795 (National Archives, HO 100/56)

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ E.A. Smith, *Whig Principles and party politics: Earl Fitzwilliam and the Whig party, 1748-1833* (Manchester, 1975), p. 177

and submitting offers of service under government control.¹⁴⁵ Although initially sceptical, the new lord-lieutenant, the earl of Camden, soon warmed to the idea. In a letter to the duke of Portland he pointed out the positive aspects of the proposal, arguing that the yeomanry might be the foundation of a useful plan to strengthen the government in Ireland.¹⁴⁶ However, he believed that any forthcoming legislation should exclude the clause from the Dungannon plan that proposed the force could be used 'to oppose the French should they attempt to invade.'¹⁴⁷ Camden feared that United Irishmen could easily infiltrate the yeomanry and prove a disruptive element in the case of any invasion.

Political pressure played a major part in the creation of the yeomanry. Increasing internal violence, civil unrest and the impending threat of invasion forced Camden to act. He was under pressure from advisors, such as Lords Clare and Carhampton, prominent leaders within the Protestant Ascendancy, to form yeomanry corps along the lines of the English model, based solely on cavalry. However, this would prove impractical, especially in Ulster where many poorer Protestants would be unable to provide their own horse. There was a need for infantry corps to be incorporated into the plan as there were not enough gentry in some areas, such as Donegal, to raise cavalry. This would then lead to lower-class membership within the infantry and raised the thorny question as to religious composition. As commander-in-chief, Carhampton had voiced his frustration at being unable to concentrate a sufficient force to challenge an invasion due to the army being distributed throughout the provinces to provide security for the gentry. He argued that such a dilemma could be solved by allowing the formation of gentry-led yeomanry corps to provide localised security against insurgents, thus allowing the release of most of his troops to

¹⁴⁵ Earl of Camden to the duke of Portland, 22 September 1796 (National Archives, HO 100/61)

¹⁴⁶ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 56

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

concentrate on external threats.¹⁴⁸ Portland had authorised Camden to raise ‘provincial levies’ but hesitated in using the term ‘yeomanry’ due to the unfavourable reception given to Fitzwilliam’s rejected plan.¹⁴⁹ He advised that any move to make the force exclusively Protestant risked alienating Catholics and fostered further unrest. Camden was fully aware of the political implications and sensitivity required over the matter and took measures to appease all parties. By allowing only reliable Catholics and Dissenters of property to enlist he addressed a major concern of Protestants by preventing the inclusion of lower-class Catholics from the infantry without alienating the Catholic gentry. This ensured sufficient support for the measure to be introduced through parliament.

The Irish yeomanry was established in September 1796 after much deliberation and prior to any authorising enactment being passed. On 17 September of that year the official plan for raising yeomanry corps was announced and published throughout national newspapers. It included a critical amendment that set the organisation apart from the English model: ‘Troops of cavalry will be preferred...but as it has been represented in certain parts of the kingdom where it might be difficult to raise cavalry alone that many respectable persons would readily serve on foot, the proportion of mounted and dismounted men in each troop must depend on local circumstances.’¹⁵⁰ This led to an immediate flood of offers from local associations and individuals, especially from Ulster and the northern counties of Leinster and Connacht, to raise local corps even before the Yeomanry Bill was introduced in October.¹⁵¹ Over-subscription proved an issue, with the government unsuccessfully attempting to cap the membership of each corps at 50 when recruits of up to 70 had

¹⁴⁸ Peter Karsten, ‘Irish soldiers in the British Army, 1792-1922: Suborned or subordinate?’, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 17 (1983-84), pp. 31-63

¹⁴⁹ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, pp. 65-66

¹⁵⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 17 September 1796, quoted in Blackstock, p. 70

¹⁵¹ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 71.

volunteered.¹⁵² County governors and land magnates called meetings of local magistrates and gentry who were tasked to administer the raising of units and the selection of suitable recruits. What resulted was a diversity of opinion as to the admissibility of Catholics due to local circumstances and lack of direction from the government.

Insufficient government directives saw a varied approach to the formation of individual corps. The yeomanry gained official recognition with the passing of the Yeomanry Bill in the Irish parliament on 25 October 1796, becoming an act of parliament after it gained royal assent two days later.¹⁵³ This allowed the organization to emerge as a uniform national structure which simultaneously contained territorially discrete, regionally diverse and complex elements. The lack of official directives regarding membership contributed to religious and political exclusiveness in some counties, which represented the local balance of power within parishes.¹⁵⁴ Existing social hierarchies that traditionally dominated parishes and towns tended to gain control of local units, sometimes at the expense and exclusion of political and religious rivals.¹⁵⁵ Protestant leaders within the Irish parliament quietly encouraged this as it was felt that this represented the natural order within Irish society and would provide stability, especially in the volatile rural areas, such as the border counties of Ulster.¹⁵⁶ This *laissez-faire* approach to recruiting by the government ensured that the yeomanry was to eventually become a solely Protestant institution that was to provide the security required to maintain the Ascendancy.

A large number of members of the dissolved volunteer associations enlisted in the yeomanry. This was somewhat ironic as it was the political power that the

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.73

¹⁵⁴ Morton, 'The Rise of the Yeomanry,' p. 63

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Camden to Pelham, 28 August 1796 (British Museum, Add. MS. 33102), quoted in Morton, p. 64

movement had previously acquired that Camden and his associates feared, resulting in his initial hesitance in accepting the raising of the yeomanry.¹⁵⁷ An examination of surviving documentation reveals that many names of officers from the volunteers also appear in the returns of yeomanry corps. In the 1970s Pádraig O'Snowdaigh conducted a study of surviving Volunteer lists, yeomanry documentation and journals and found considerable correlation between Volunteer and yeomanry membership. In Monaghan, Donegal and Roscommon he found around 50 per cent of surnames recurring in yeomanry lists.¹⁵⁸ In Meath, from 88 yeomanry surnames, he found 20 in Volunteer lists, while in Limerick and Roscommon, the location continuity rate was around 50 per cent, with 43 per cent in Monaghan.¹⁵⁹ Although this evidence is limited in that there are very few Volunteer lists available for comparison due to the secret nature of the organisation and the few surviving yeomanry returns only record the names of officers, it does give an indication of strong linkages between the membership of the two organisations. However, this should not be surprising as it was the minor gentry, merchants and farmers from the middling classes that had gained influence in the provinces and feared the loss of their prosperity through peasant rebellion or invasion by French republican forces. By 1792-93 the volunteers were increasingly dominated by more radical elements within the middle-classes of Irish society compared to the more inclusive organisation of the period 1778-83, and included a large number of United Irishmen, especially in Ulster. The quashing of the Volunteers in 1793 may have ensured the disarming of an increasingly radical armed group but it had also left a void in the ability of this class to maintain any localised self-defence force and the raising of the yeomanry provided an opportunity to resume the tradition.

¹⁵⁷ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 266

¹⁵⁸ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 76

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

The radical Protestant 'Orange' movement also provided a significant membership within the yeomanry. Extreme 'Orange' loyalism had grown from the ranks of lower class Anglicans in County Armagh in response to the increasing level of violence sponsored by Catholic Defenders during the mid 1790s. The movement proved popular and quickly spread to neighbouring counties. However, the inclusion of Orangemen within the yeomanry was treated with much suspicion by the authorities in Dublin Castle, who viewed the democratic and anti-Catholic stance of the loyalists as a potential threat to internal stability. Camden voiced his concerns in a letter to the duke of Portland: 'How impolitic and unwise...to refuse the offers of Protestants to enter the yeomanry ...yet how dangerous is even any encouragement to the Orange spirit, whilst our army is composed of Catholics, as the militia generally is.'¹⁶⁰ His concern had some foundation, with a detachment of the Kerry Militia, a predominantly Catholic regiment, being ambushed near Stewartstown, County Tyrone, Ulster in September 1797 by a combined force of local yeomanry, the Tay Fencibles and the regular cavalry of the 24th Light Dragoons.¹⁶¹ This resulted in a number of casualties and strained relationships within the Irish garrison. Nevertheless, the Orangemen were openly encouraged into the yeomanry at local levels and played a significant role in the policing of their communities.

The Orange elements of the yeomanry were mainly limited to the counties within, or those that bordered, Ulster. In 1796 Orangeism was geographically limited to mid-Ulster, with official membership being estimated at only several thousand men. However, the movement quickly spread and by early 1797 approximately 30,000 Orangemen had enlisted in yeomanry corps.¹⁶² This was significant in that by December 1797 there were only 35,000 men enlisted in the yeomanry, 14,290 of

¹⁶⁰ Camden to the duke of Portland, 11 June 1798 (National Archive, HO 100/77)

¹⁶¹ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 270

¹⁶² Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 92

which came from corps within Ulster (Table 3.1).¹⁶³ And although exact figures can not be obtained, John Cookson estimates that eventually one-in-three serviceable Protestant males aged between 18 and 45 were to join the yeomanry, where in Ulster almost every Protestant of military age was to become a yeoman.¹⁶⁴ This also indicates how quickly the movement had spread, with another 15,000 Orangemen registered as members of other corps throughout the country.¹⁶⁵ However, the reliability of these figures must be treated with caution as reliance has been placed mainly on official returns forwarded to the Home Office. Allan Blackstock argues that there are discrepancies between establishment totals and the actual inspection returns, which he claims were due to absenteeism and the fraudulent practice of including ‘paper’ soldiers to extract extra funds from the government.¹⁶⁶ Although he further states that taking this into consideration, the margin of error would be insufficient to change the overall impression.

	1797	1798	1799	1803	1810	1817
Ulster	39 %	36 %	40 %	42 %	45 %	64 %
Leinster	33 %	33 %	32 %	31 %	29 %	21 %
Munster	18 %	22 %	19 %	19 %	17 %	7 %
Connacht	11 %	10 %	9 %	8 %	9 %	8 %

Table 3.1 - Yeomanry: Provincial Comparison

(Source: Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 122)

‘Orangeism’ spread rapidly throughout the yeomanry corps in the north of Ireland. Anti-autocracy and anti-Catholic traditions played a part in this, combined with the perceived physical and political threats Protestants felt with the recent

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 117

¹⁶⁴ J.E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815* (Oxford, 1997), p. 167

¹⁶⁵ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 117

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 113

concessions given to Catholics. The failed French invasion attempt at Bantry Bay in late December 1796 further increased the anxiety of the civilian population, leading to an upsurge in patriotic fervour and a willingness to assist in the defence of the kingdom through joining armed loyalist associations.¹⁶⁷ General John Knox, the commander-in-chief of the military forces in County Tyrone and a Protestant land magnate in that county, actively supported the arming of Orange associations by proposing the formation of Orange fencibles. When this move was rejected by the government, he then promoted the inclusion of these organizations into the yeomanry as a defence measure against the perceived threat posed to Protestants by the posting of Catholic militia in Ulster.¹⁶⁸ In a letter to Edward Cooke, Camden's under-secretary, in August 1796 he argued for the inclusion of Orangemen within the yeomanry: 'As to the Orange Men we have rather a difficult card to play, they must not be entirely discountenanced, on the contrary, we must, in a certain degree, uphold them, for, with all their licentiousness, on them must we rely for the preservation of our lives and properties, should critical times occur.'¹⁶⁹ Knox was a greater advocate for the inclusion of Orangemen in the yeomanry than his letter to Cooke suggests. In early 1797 many parts of Ulster were proclaimed under the Insurrection Act that gave magistrates unprecedented power to search and seize arms. At this time, not only did he indicate to the yeomanry in Armagh not to seize weapons of Orangemen, but he also fostered their inclusion into yeomanry corps by seeking specific permission from Thomas Pelham, Camden's chief secretary, to add these radical loyalists as

¹⁶⁷ Morton, 'The Rise of the Yeomanry,' p. 64

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 93

¹⁶⁹ Knox to Cooke, 13 August 1796 (National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers 620/24/106), quoted in Blackstock, p. 61

supplementary men to the corps led by James Verner.¹⁷⁰ He further sought to create a new corps entirely of Orangemen, who would display their loyalty by wearing orange ribbons.¹⁷¹ The inevitability of such measures became apparent to others such as Lord Auckland who spoke of a pragmatic approach to the worsening situation in Ireland: ‘These Orange Boys...are growing numerous and are most inveterate against the United Irishmen. They are a dangerous ally; however, to a certain extent, it is necessary to use them.’¹⁷²

The creation of the yeomanry was an essential strategic measure. By 1796 the threat of invasion together with increased civil unrest throughout Ireland had placed immense pressure on the army and the government. The demands of Britain’s foreign military operations had led to a massive reduction in the number of regular troops on the Irish Establishment, ensuring that the inexperienced and dispersed militia became the largest element within the army. It became apparent that this force was inadequate to provide both the necessary internal security against insurrection as well as providing an effective counter-invasion force. Camden was reluctant to establish a para-military force of armed civilian volunteers, mainly due to the political power previously achieved by the Volunteer movement in the early 1780s.¹⁷³ However, the worsening domestic and foreign situation in 1796 forced his hand: ‘I do not like to resort to yeomanry cavalry or infantry or armed associations if I can help it, but I can see no other recourse at the present time – the army must be withdrawn from many of its present quarters and must be drawn together to act in larger units than it has lately

¹⁷⁰ Knox to Pelham, 2 January 1797 (British Library, Pelham Papers, Add. MS 33103, ff 379-380), quoted in Allan Blackstock, ‘The Irish Yeomanry and the 1798 Rebellion,’ in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, ed. Thomas Bartlett (Dublin, 2003), p. 335

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Auckland to Lord Mornington, 22 April 1798 (British Library, Wellesley Papers, Add. MS 37308 f. 132), quoted in Blackstock, ‘The Irish Yeomanry and the 1798 Rebellion,’ p. 340

¹⁷³ Morton, ‘The Rise of the Yeomanry,’ p. 60

done.’¹⁷⁴ His repeated requests for reinforcements of regular regiments from Britain had largely proved fruitless, ensuring that rural Ireland could not effectively be policed. The formation of a government-controlled yeomanry was thus seen as the only alternative to provide the security being demanded by the propertied population.

The landed magnates provided the political leadership in the yeomanry. It was powerful and wealthy Protestant Irish peers, such as the duke of Leinster, the marquis of Abercorn and Lord Downshire, that the lesser classes looked to for patronage in forming the corps.¹⁷⁵ Such men not only had political influence in ensuring government support for the formation of the yeomanry at a national level, but they also provided leadership at local level, where many held positions as county governors. Although the yeomanry was centrally controlled from Dublin Castle, the county governors and landed magnates maintained a greater influence over the corps within their localities.¹⁷⁶ It was these men who mostly determined who received officer commissions within individual units and it was through their patronage that these were confirmed by the lord lieutenant.¹⁷⁷ The system of patronage was well established and accepted within 18th century British and Irish society due to its perceived ability to maintain stability within the social hierarchy.¹⁷⁸ Thus, it was in the interests of the aristocrats to support any self-defence measures proposed by the middle classes that would defend against the serious threat posed to them by militant republicans and the rebellious Catholic peasantry. However, although many Irish peers (some of whom were already colonels of militia regiments, such as Lord Downshire) also provided financial backing and accepted colonelcies for numerous

¹⁷⁴ Camden to Pelham, 28 August 1796 (British Museum, Add. MSS. 33102), quoted Morton, p.63

¹⁷⁵ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 103

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Nelson, pp. 54-55

yeomanry corps, especially those from their estates, most only provided nominal leadership roles, preferring to leave active command to county squires.¹⁷⁹

The gentry provided the practical leadership within the yeomanry. It was this social class that potentially had the most to lose through rebellion of the peasantry and it was the drive for self-interest and self-preservation that saw thousands offer their service and allegiance to the crown. It had been these people, together with farmers, merchants and other middling classes, who had been seeking greater protection from the state after being the main victims of insurgent activities.¹⁸⁰ The gentry had successfully argued their traditional local leadership should be reflected in the yeomanry where they could maintain the law and prevent the rise of vigilante groups. The government looked to establish individual corps based on the traditional parish system where each county was divided into a number of smaller administrative districts. This was seen as providing stability within communities by transferring the accepted civilian hierarchy into leadership roles within the yeomanry. Thus, the influence that these landholders held within their districts made them natural leaders and ensured the required support within the parish to rapidly establish local troops or companies.¹⁸¹ Patronage ensured that mostly substantial farmers or minor gentry were offered commissions. Although the right of election of officers remained within each corps, ballots were discouraged by the hierarchy for being too democratic, with elections sometimes provoking social tension.¹⁸²

Each corps was initially established within specifications directed by the government. Infantry units were to be around 100 men strong, with cavalry corps

¹⁷⁹ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 128

¹⁸⁰ Camden to Portland, 22 September, 1796 (National Archives, HO 100/61)

¹⁸¹ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 72

¹⁸² Ibid.,

being around 50, but no less than 40.¹⁸³ Each cavalry volunteer was required to provide his own horse, with many gentry providing mounts for those tenants, servants, retainers and volunteers who lacked sufficient funds to do so themselves. The yeomanry was to comprise mainly of cavalry and infantry, although there were also some small components of artillery. Examples of this include the Dublin Lawyers Corps, which although an infantry unit, had a small artillery section, as well as the Loyal Loughlinstown Yeomanry, whose gunners manned the defences at Loughlinstown army camp, 12 miles south-east of Dublin.¹⁸⁴ However, the size of corps could fluctuate depending on the current political situation. This occurred in April 1798 when a number of supplementary yeomanry units were created and attached to corps as unpaid and un-uniformed auxiliaries to serve in emergencies or to fill vacancies.¹⁸⁵ The majority of these volunteers came from within ‘Orange’ organisations.

Each corps was commanded by a captain, who was to be assisted by several junior officers, lieutenants and cornets. Often in rural areas the captain’s residence became the administrative headquarters of the unit. This proved a practical measure in that the strongly built substantial homes of the gentry provided rallying points in troubled times that could be used as defensive strongholds. Such tactics were also implemented in urban centres where stone-built government buildings provided the focus for yeomanry defence system. The defence measures for Dublin provide the prime examples of this where the Lawyers Corp headquarters were at the Four Courts and the Revenue Corps headquarters were at the Custom House.¹⁸⁶ Metropolitan centres such as Dublin and Cork had sufficient population to raise a number of

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 98

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 98,

yeomanry corps based on, and named after, their professions. These included the aforementioned Lawyers and Revenue corps, along with units formed from students from Trinity College. In rural areas the units were usually named after the parish from which the volunteers came.

The establishment of each corps was determined through a combination of government directives and local influence. The lord lieutenant issued officers commissions in the name of the king to those who were nominated by the local county governor or aristocrats who were raising corps from within their own estates. Dublin Castle stipulated that each corps was to have a minimum of two officers, a captain and a lieutenant, with other commissions being offered as required.¹⁸⁷ The state provided wages for a permanent sergeant to be attached to each unit. These men were usually retired regular soldiers who were employed to instil formal drill and discipline into the untrained volunteers. The government also provided for the full-time employment of a drummer or trumpeter for each corps. However, once the cadre of the corps were established, a more democratic approach was allowed within each unit. Committees were formed from unit members to regulate discipline, finances and membership. Prospective members required voting support from two-thirds of the committee to be eligible to join the corps.¹⁸⁸ It was this practice that ensured that many Catholics and political rivals of officers were refused entry. It was only when placed on permanent duty that the yeomanry lost their democratic rights, coming under strict military discipline and the command of district generals and the commander-in-chief of the army.

Discipline within the corps was self-regulating. Enrolment in the yeomanry was seen as socially acceptable and fashionable amongst the middle classes in Britain

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 102-103

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

and Ireland during the period. Peer pressure ensured that volunteers conformed to the accepted political attitudes and social behaviours within their local communities. Corps committees determined disciplinary practices within individual units, although these were based on behaviour codes formulated by captains for their troops. Those who breached such codes risked banishment from the corps and social embarrassment. It was only in times of war, when under direct command of the military that serious breach of conduct resulted in capital punishment. During the rebellion of 1798 a small number of yeomen were executed for desertion, with some having sided with the rebels.¹⁸⁹ However, men who deserted from their corps after this time were saved from the hangman's noose by agreeing to military service overseas. Thomas Bartlett argues that lax discipline within the armed forces of Ireland during the 1790s can be largely traced to the enormous expansion in numbers, especially in the yeomanry where most officers lacked any formal military experience and training was generally limited to several days per week.¹⁹⁰

The state maintained some control over the yeomanry by providing every corps with pay, uniforms and arms. To promote efficiency and martial appearance, the government had agreed to pay wages for each yeoman to train with his corps two days per week. Undoubtedly, these wages would have been claimed, but there is little surviving evidence to indicate how often the individual units actually spent training. It is most likely that the amount of training carried out by units would have been determined by the level of enthusiasm of commanding officers. In an effort to deviate from the old volunteer units, the government attempted to regulate the uniforms issued to the corps. Infantry units were to wear uniforms similar to those of regular infantry regiments: white breeches, red jackets with blue collar and cuffs, but without

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 106

¹⁹⁰ Bartlett, 'Indiscipline and disaffection in Ireland in the 1790s,' p.116

facings, as well as the ubiquitous black felt cocked hats.¹⁹¹ The yeoman cavalry were dressed similarly to the light dragoons of the regular army: white riding breeches, thigh length boots, short blue or red jackets and ‘Tarleton’ helmets. However, in practice, there was a variety of uniforms worn, with the government having to compromise in an effort to promote *esprit de corps* within the yeomanry.¹⁹² Providing sufficient weapons posed a problem for the government with the distribution system unable to cope with the demand. Infantrymen were to be issued with cartridge boxes, bayonets and ‘Brown Bess’ muskets, while cavalrymen were to receive pistols and light dragoon sabres. However, in January 1797 only 14,000 out of 24,000 yeomen had been issued arms, with most of these weapons being in poor condition.¹⁹³ Many volunteers purchased their own weapons through necessity, keeping them at their homes instead of being secured at the unit headquarters. Although this was a practical measure to provide personal safety, it also made many yeomen targets for rebel activities, with houses being raided to secure firearms for the planned rebellion.

The yeomanry was to become a predominantly Protestant institution, although initially Catholics were included in its membership. Contrary to the views promoted by some nationalist historians concerning the yeomanry, there was no official anti-Catholic or anti-Presbyterian policy regarding recruiting: Camden had told Lord Waterford that it was unwise to refuse Catholics into the yeomanry and wrote to Lord Downshire stating that trustworthy Catholics and dissenters should be included in his corps.¹⁹⁴ However, the enlistment of Catholics and religious dissenters proved to be a contentious issue, especially in Ulster. Catholic enlistment was actively discouraged by the opposition within the Irish parliament, as well as the influential ‘Catholic

¹⁹¹ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 107

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.111

¹⁹⁴ Camden to Lord Downshire October, 1796 (Public Records Office, Northern Ireland, Downshire Papers, D 607/D/142), quoted in Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 128

Committee,' an organisation established in the early 1790s to promote Catholic interests, which consisted of leading Catholic gentry, businessmen and clergy who saw the yeomanry as a tool of oppression against the Catholic peasantry.¹⁹⁵ Camden had told Lord Waterford that it was unwise to refuse Catholics into the yeomanry as it may lead to further unrest amongst the population.¹⁹⁶ However, in a later letter to the duke of Portland, he made it clear that he was supportive of them enlisting as individuals into existing corps rather than joining 'en masse' and forming their own units.¹⁹⁷ The rarity of complete muster rolls makes it hard to determine a definitive denominational breakdown of the yeomanry corps, although there are a number of known examples where Catholics played a significant role. Allan Blackstock argues that an examination of the surviving 'Derry Muster Rolls' suggests that there is a correlation between Catholic membership and the concentration of native Irish surnames. These records show that the Banagher Yeomen Cavalry had 14 Catholics, all with native surnames, out of a membership of 53.¹⁹⁸ The dismounted section of the same corps had 81 with native names out of a total of 82 members. The Faughan Glen Yeomen Infantry proved to be a mixed unit with Catholics outnumbering Protestants 34 to 18 in 1798 and 33 to 8 in 1800.¹⁹⁹ What makes these figures so significant is that even after the events of 1798, Catholics continued to be retained in reasonable numbers in some corps. Blackstock claims that these indicate that Catholics were readily accepted into the yeomanry in areas, such as Counties Derry and Donegal, where Catholics owned land and there were few Protestants.

¹⁹⁵ Connelly, *The Oxford companion of Irish History*, pp. 78-79

¹⁹⁶ Camden to Waterford, 14 September 1796 (Public Records Office, Northern Ireland, K.A.O. Pratt Papers, U840/0174/15), quoted in Allan Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 128

¹⁹⁷ Camden to Portland, 3 January 1797 (National Archives, HO 100/69)

¹⁹⁸ Derry Muster Rolls, T1021/3 (Public Records Office, Northern Ireland), quoted in Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 130

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

Trustworthiness appears to have been the main government criteria for membership within the yeomanry, rather than religion. The gentry and other persons of property who had the most to lose from rebellion assumed the trust of the state on the grounds that they would be determined to defend the status quo, regardless of religious denomination. The chief aim of Whig policies in Ireland was to reconcile the Catholic gentry and moneyed class to the British state and to cement a 'union of property' against Jacobin subversion.²⁰⁰ Allowing prominent Catholics to raise yeomanry corps to prove their loyalty was an obvious tactic to achieve these goals. This was evident with Catholic peers, such as Lord Gormanston, receiving official authority to raise and command a cavalry corps in County Meath that consisted of 40 Catholics.²⁰¹ Lord Donoughmore's Cork Legion consisted of many wealthy Catholics, where native surnames were prevalent, while Lord Kenmare raised a predominantly Catholic cavalry corps in Killarney.²⁰² There also appears to be a strong correlation between Catholic membership and wealth and property, which was the general criteria for acceptance into yeomanry cavalry corps throughout the kingdom, excepting certain counties in Ulster. Each yeoman had to provide his own horse and uniform, the cost of which proved prohibitive to both Catholic and Protestant peasants, ensuring that yeoman cavalry corps consisted of members of the gentry and the middle-classes, along with some of their retainers.²⁰³ Blackstock estimates that there were 2-3,000 Catholics in the yeomanry in 1797, with most of them in cavalry units in the south of the country.²⁰⁴ This was at a time when the yeomanry had a total strength of 35,000, of which 14,000 were in Ulster.²⁰⁵ Statistics recorded by the Protestant

²⁰⁰ Smith, p. 177

²⁰¹ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 132

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 134

²⁰³ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 265

²⁰⁴ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 134

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

zealot, Sir Richard Musgrave, in a pamphlet published in 1799, indicate strong Catholic membership in the various cavalry corps of Leinster, especially in Wexford, where the majority of infantry corps consisted of Catholics. Examples include: the Shelmaliere cavalry that contained 24 Catholics, the Castletown Cavalry that had 46 and the Coolgreary Cavalry that boasted 16. Musgrave also claims that one third of the Clane Cavalry in Kildare consisted of ‘papists’, while the Rathcoole infantry contained 3 Catholic officers and 42 privates.²⁰⁶ The reliability of Musgrave’s figures remains in question due to his overt bias towards the Ascendancy where he has attempted to use these figures to argue a Catholic conspiracy with the United Irishmen in the rebellion. However, what they indicate is that there was a limited level of trust placed in wealthy Catholics, and the extent of their involvement within the yeomanry prior to the rebellion of 1798.

The yeomanry were considered a key element in the defensive strategy for Ireland, especially after the attempted French invasion at Bantry Bay in December 1796. At this time it was feared that any such invasion would be supported by a simultaneous internal rebellion led by the United Irishmen. The military strategy formulated after the failed landing called for the concentration of the bulk of the regular forces and the militia regiments to form a sizable army to either confront the enemy in open battle or to man defensive lines based on geographical boundaries, such as the rivers Shannon and Blackwater.²⁰⁷ The yeomanry had three important roles to play in this strategy. Firstly, the main duty of the corps was to maintain law and order in their localities and to quickly deal with any insurgent activities that may occur. The yeomanry was expected to perform town garrison duties, including

²⁰⁶ Sir Richard Musgrave, *Observations on a pamphlet lately published by an officer entitled ‘Imperial relation of the military operations which took place in Ireland’* (Dublin, 1799), quoted in Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 131

²⁰⁷ D.A. Chart, ‘The Irish Levies During the Great French War,’ *English Historical Review*, vol. 32 (1917), pp. 497-516

providing guards at gaols, in the case of invasion.²⁰⁸ The second role was to aid the military forces by keeping the lines of communication open so that the army could receive dispatches, munitions and other supplies required to maintain it in the field. The third role involved the yeomen cavalry acting as irregular forces behind enemy-held territory. It was envisaged the mounted corps would slow the movement of the French by employing guerrilla-style tactics of harassing lines of communication, destroying bridges, attacking supply convoys and supplying the army with essential information regarding enemy troop movements.²⁰⁹ This strategic use of the yeomanry was sound in theory as the volunteers would have lacked the training and discipline required to confront the enemy in open battle.

The yeomanry proved most effective when used in policing roles. Prior to the rebellion and invasion of 1798 the yeomanry became an essential tool of the government in dealing with civil unrest. Throughout 1797-1798 there had been an increasing breakdown in law and order in parts of Ireland, especially in the northern counties, where the yeomanry were heavily relied upon to provide local intelligence and manpower for the escalating counter-terror operations promoted by the government. In practice, it was the quality of leadership and discipline within individual corps that determined how effectively the yeomanry carried out its specified roles. Magistrates came to depend upon the corps to help enforce the Insurrection Act. The yeomanry were immediately available and could provide local knowledge which the regulars, fencibles and militia lacked. It was the localised nature of the yeomanry that was the main feature of its military strength, where as first potential victims of insurrection, the yeomen had a vested interest in immediately and vigorously reacting to any threat. In March 1797 General Lake was given discretion to

²⁰⁸ General Dalrymple to Thomas Pelham, 1 February 1797 (National Library, Ireland, MS 809)

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

act independently of local magistrates if he felt conditions were justified. This led to some districts coming under de-facto martial law, with the subsequent security operations that followed being known as the ‘dragooning’ of Ulster.²¹⁰ The lack of troops available to carry out such measures ensured that Lake and his subordinate, Knox, were reliant on the yeomanry to perform the required duties of searching and seizing arms and suspects. Yeomanry were also used in similar operations in Dublin and some disturbed southern counties in early 1798. This included County Wexford in March and April of that year where the yeomanry was heavily relied upon due to maintain the peace due to the insufficient number of troops stationed there, with Pakenham claiming their over-vigorous actions promoted the civilian uprising.²¹¹ However, in general, where the yeomanry proved most effective was functioning as a deterrent, where its very existence meant a constant local presence of armed strength.

The weak infrastructure of law and government in Ireland at this time ensured some local autonomy for the yeomanry corps. In the provinces the government was reliant on local magistrates to ensure law and order, although the magistrates had to rely on the army and yeomanry to enforce the law. This situation contributed to disorder spreading throughout the kingdom where in some localities the authority of the law was supplanted by the personal interests of the commanding officers of the yeomanry. In many areas local magistrates had become impotent in administering civil law due to intimidation and fear of being murdered by rebels, leading to the temporary introduction of martial law. This then ensured that local army commanders, who could be impatient of, and contemptuous of civil authority, could conduct their counter-insurgent operations without the ‘niceties’ of the legal system. General Knox, a strong promoter of yeomanry intervention in Ulster argued that the law was

²¹⁰ Blackstock, ‘The Irish Yeomanry and the 1798 Rebellion,’ pp. 336-337

²¹¹ Pakenham, pp. 162-165

insufficient to quell rebellion: 'Laws though ever so strict will not do...severe military execution alone will recover the arms from the hands of the rebels.'²¹² Camden and his advisors advocated counter-terror tactics and encouraged excessive behaviour by the army and yeomanry by proclaiming the suspension of civil rights in disaffected areas, thus removing restrictions that some saw as preventing the maintenance of order and forestalling insurgency.²¹³ This provided unscrupulous yeomanry officers with the opportunity to exceed their authority and seek revenge on local political rivals. Such activities included destruction of property, imprisonment without trial, and murders for which few were held accountable.²¹⁴ The 'independence' of the yeomanry was shown to its full effect in 1798 where the increasingly violent activities of insurgents were countered by retaliatory actions of local yeomanry who acted without seeking orders from higher authorities.²¹⁵ It was this inability to effectively control the largely untrained and ill-disciplined yeomanry corps that not only fostered disorder leading up to the rebellion, but also ensured the government remained sensitive to the challenge the corps posed to the state's monopoly of armed force in the kingdom.

The yeomanry earned an unsavoury reputation within a short period. The yeomanry force crucially functioned as an agent of counter-revolution in the period 1796-1798, where 'terror' was increasingly used by both sides and reached a climax with the atrocities committed during the rebellion. Patriotic fervour and over-zealous actions within the corps led to numerous official complaints to the government.²¹⁶

²¹² Knox to Abercorn, 21 March 1797 (Public Records Office, Northern Ireland, T 2542/1B3/6/10), quoted in Thomas Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' in *A Military History of Ireland*, eds. Thomas Bartlett & Keith Jeffrey (Cambridge, 1996), p. 270

²¹³ Bartlett, 'Indiscipline and disaffection in Ireland in the 1790s,' p.120

²¹⁴ G.A. Hayes-McCoy, 'The Government Forces Which Opposed the Irish Insurgents of 1798,' *The Irish Sword*, vol. 4 (1959), p. 17

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Stewart, p. 52

This was especially so concerning the operations in Ulster, where the indiscriminate violence used by the yeomen, such as hanging suspects by their feet and lashing them with ropes and belts, was possibly encouraged, and at the very least, ignored by superior officers.²¹⁷ The use of terror in counter-terror operations was seen at the time as the best deterrent to rebellion, and coupled with the indiscipline of the yeomanry, ultimately led to numerous floggings, houses burning and deaths.²¹⁸ The most notorious incident occurred in July 1797 at Newry where defenceless civilians, including children, were murdered by local yeomanry and members of a Welsh fencibles regiment known as the 'Ancient Britons.'²¹⁹ And although an official excuse was given that such action was taken in response to the murder of a local magistrate, on this occasion even loyalists protested at the 'wanton and gratuitous ferocity of the attack.'²²⁰ However, in general, most complaints related to the destruction of property, that, if not sanctioned by the government, were certainly encouraged by Knox who had openly spoken of the need for 'spiriting up' opposition to the United Irishmen by opposing violence with violence.²²¹ This was further fostered by members of the Irish parliament resurrecting the Williamite traditions of 1690 through emotive speeches that cast the conflict in apocalyptic terms, portraying it as a struggle for survival.²²²

Although based on the self-defence traditions of the volunteers, the yeomanry never represented the old Protestant nationalism promoted by that organization. The volunteers had been formed in some part as a protest to the economic restrictions

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Blackstock, 'The Irish Yeomanry and the 1798 Rebellion,' pp. 336-337

²¹⁹ Allan L. Carswell, 'The Scottish Fencible Regiments in Ireland,' *The Irish Sword*, vol. 21 (1998), pp. 155-159

²²⁰ Blackstock, 'The Irish Yeomanry and the 1798 Rebellion,' pp. 336-337

²²¹ General Knox to Lord Abercorn, 21 March, 1797 (Public Records office, Northern Ireland, Abercorn Papers, T 2541/183/610), quoted in Bartlett, 'Indiscipline and disaffection in Ireland in the 1790s,'

p. 120

²²² Myers & McKnight, pp. 161-162

placed on the Irish by Britain that had led to anger and calls for self-determination.²²³

However, in the 1790s, instead of voicing their need for greater political independence that had been the catch-cry of the late 1770s and early 1780s, the Protestant Ascendancy was reliant on Britain as an ally to ensure the maintenance of power and control in Ireland. British military and naval support was now essential in dealing with the increasing threats of internal rebellion and invasion that could potentially see the oligarchy of the Ascendancy replaced with a republic. The inclusion of the Orange orders into the corps also influenced the character of the yeomanry. Orangeism was based on loyalty to the crown, with strong religious connections through the Anglican Church.²²⁴ With the vast majority of the Protestant members of the corps being either Orangemen, Anglicans, or both, it is quite clear why, although being an Irish institution, the yeomanry as an organization would be more supportive of retaining its British links. The fear of the rise of Catholic peasantry who were a substantial percentage of the population was also a huge incentive for the yeomanry to support internal intervention by Britain. The increase in sectarian violence fostered fears amongst the Protestant minority of religious extermination, who argued for Britain to supply a significant increase in loyal troops for the garrison to ensure their safety.

The yeomanry became an integral element within the military establishment of Ireland from the time of its inception in 1796 and throughout the years of war with France. Dublin Castle was forced to actively support the formal creation of the corps to ensure control over the numerous armed reactionary groups that were being established in the troubled counties to provide local security for the gentry and middle classes. Through rapid augmentation the yeomanry became an essential force in the

²²³ Martin, pp. 57-59

²²⁴ Peter R. Newman (ed.), *Companion to Irish History: From the submission of Tyrone to Partition, 1603-1921* (London & New York, 1991), p. 8

defence strategy of the kingdom where the corps were to be used as an internal police force, especially in counter-insurgent operations, thus in theory freeing the militia and regular troops to concentrate on counter-invasion defence (Table 3.2). Issues of ill-discipline, murder, nepotism and corruption, coupled with the religious fervour of the Orangemen who were incorporated into the corps in large numbers, led to the tarnishing of the reputation of the yeomanry, although such issues were generally overlooked by authorities at the time. Ultimately, the yeomanry developed into a powerful para-military organization that not only proved essential in the defence of the country, but more importantly for some, it also ensured the armed protection of the interests of the Protestant Ascendancy.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Establishment</i>	<i>Effectives</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Establishment</i>	<i>Effectives</i>
Dec. 1796	21,000		Nov. 1804	70,000	64,000
Dec. 1797	35,000		Dec. 1805		70,000
May 1798	50,000		Apr. 1806	82,000	64,000
1799	66,000		May 1807	69,000	61,000
1800	54,000		Apr. 1808	80,000	75,000
Nov. 1801	52,000		Mar. 1810	85,000	
June 1802	51,000		Dec. 1815		45,000
1803	83,000	70,000			

Table 3.2 - Yeomanry Corps establishment, 1796-1815

(Source: Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 114)

Chapter 4

British Military Presence and the Management of the Irish Garrison up to 1798

There is no doubt that the experience of the rebellion of 1798 and subsequent French invasion later that year were to determine the military occupation of Ireland by Britain. However, a greater understanding of the British military presence in the kingdom prior to the rebellion is necessary to emphasize the extent of the latter occupation. A deeper study of this period is also necessary to evaluate the affects that the dual defence roles of internal and external security had on the Irish military establishment, and how the strategies and tactics employed by the government and senior army officers influenced the United Irish uprising. The argument within this chapter is supportive of the consensus amongst Irish revisionists, such as Thomas Bartlett and Marianne Elliott, that the oppressive nature of the disarming campaigns carried out by the armed forces and promoted by the Irish government were instrumental in encouraging support for insurrection.²²⁵ However, in contrast to the traditional view fostered by some British historians, such as Sir John Fortescue, that the Irish establishment was incompetent prior to the uprising, such tactics did prove effective in weakening the United Irish movement and greatly reduced the chance of the rebellion succeeding.²²⁶ Furthermore, contrary to the traditional unflattering perception of the British fencible regiments that served in Ireland, there is evidence that indicates that some regiments, particularly the Scottish units, proved to be quality troops and played a significant role in the defence of Ireland, and thus Britain. What is evident is that political interference and Ascendancy bias against the Irish militia and the Catholic population was detrimental to the effectiveness of the army in Ireland,

²²⁵ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland 1793-1803,' p. 248

²²⁶ J.W. Fortescue, *A History of the British Army*, vol. 4, part 1 (London, 1915), p. 597

causing mistrust, confusion and ill-discipline at all levels within the armed forces, not just in the militia, which has been the traditional view.²²⁷

Britain had maintained a substantial military presence in Ireland since the Williamite Wars of the early 1690s and throughout the 18th century. The perceived threat posed to the Protestant oligarchy by Catholics, who accounted for an estimated three quarters of the population, ensured the need for a significant number of troops being permanently stationed in Ireland.²²⁸ Throughout the century Britain was also in near constant conflict with France which necessitated a strong garrison to defend against the repeated threats of invasion. During this period Ireland was seen by the French and the British as a key strategic location that offered both offensive and defensive opportunities that could not be ignored. The policies concerning the distribution and management of the armed forces stationed in Ireland were determined by numerous factors such as internal politics, threat of rebellion, threat of invasion, rising sectarian tension and the constant demand for troops for military operations in the West Indies and the Continent. The war with Revolutionary France from 1793 increased the demand for troops and significantly altered the dynamics of the British army in Ireland. What resulted was the introduction of conflicting defensive policies: counter-invasion, which required the concentration of the army to provide a force large enough to defeat any invasion, and counter-insurgency, which required the dispersal of the armed forces to police against increasing rebel activity throughout the kingdom. These incompatible strategies created tension within Irish political circles, as well as amongst the military leadership. Although the threat of French incursion remained constant, political pressure from the Ascendancy due to increasing internal

²²⁷ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland 1793-1803,' p. 248

²²⁸ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 19

violence ensured the dispersal of the army throughout the kingdom, seriously hindering its ability deal with any sizable invasion force.

When the Revolutionary French government declared war on Great Britain in February 1793 the British were militarily unprepared. In the ten years following the 1783 Treaty of Versailles that ended the American War of Independence, the British army had been cut back to 44,000 officers and men.²²⁹ This was hardly enough to maintain the weak overseas garrisons, with only a few thousand men remaining for the defence of the British Isles or to carry out any offensive operations. The British government was now forced to rapidly mobilise its military forces through heavy recruitment drives throughout the British Isles, including Catholic Ireland. At this time Britain had entered into a coalition with a number of continental states that were also at war with France, such as Spain, the Dutch Republic, Austria and numerous German states, and had committed itself to provide a small army for operations in Flanders.²³⁰ Established regiments of seasoned and experienced soldiers had to be found quickly, resulting in the reduction of British garrisons throughout the empire. Ireland had the largest garrison and its close proximity to the area of operations ensured that the number of troops within the kingdom was rapidly and seriously depleted. This posed a major problem for those responsible for the security of the country.

The Irish government was responsible for the military forces in Ireland in the late 18th century, with the Irish parliament providing financial support under the direction of the lord lieutenant. Prior to 1793 the official 'Irish Establishment' consisted solely of regular regiments of the British army that had been posted to Ireland to perform permanent garrison duties or had been temporarily sent to the

²²⁹ Allan Shepperd, *The Connaught Rangers* (London, 1972), p. 3

²³⁰ Ibid.

kingdom for the purpose of recruiting. However, at the outbreak of war with France in 1793 Ireland was largely independent of Great Britain in military matters. The Irish government was financially responsible for all the troops stationed in the kingdom and even funded a number of regiments for overseas service.²³¹ The establishment was maintained with resources, such as wheat, barley and horses, from within the kingdom and even the army's gunpowder and small arms were produced by the Ordnance department at the arsenal in Dublin.²³² However, Ireland became increasingly reliant on Britain to provide additional troops for its defence to counter the dual threats of rebellion and invasion. Sea links in the Irish Sea remained controlled by the Royal Navy ensuring reinforcements could be quickly transported when required, although such forces could take weeks to embark due to the few regiments available in Britain, as transpired in 1798.²³³ The Irish establishment was directly under the control of the lord lieutenant, who acted as the representative of the king, having the title of 'Captain General and commander-in-chief,' although most viceroys concentrated mainly on civil matters. In 1769 the official peace-time strength of the establishment had been increased from 12,000 rank and file to 15,000 which had been decided by a vote in the Irish parliament and was to be financed by the Irish government.²³⁴ It was argued that the security of Ireland had to be maintained not only due to its close proximity to Britain but also due to its importance in maintaining trans-Atlantic shipping routes that Britain, and thus Ireland, relied on for increasing commercial prosperity.

Military appointments and commissions were made by the lord lieutenant, subject to the approval of the king. Ireland had its own War Office that was

²³¹ Martin, pp. 12-14

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Hayes-McCoy, 'The Government Forces Which Opposed the Irish Insurgents of 1798,' p. 28

²³⁴ Chart, pp. 497-516

established as the military department of the chief secretary's office. This department was administered by an under-secretary who presided over six sub-branches that co-ordinated the logistical requirements of the military establishment: the Commissariat which was responsible for food and forage; the Muster Master-Generals office which provided monthly returns of regimental strengths; the Barrack Board and Board of Works responsible for the quartering of troops and maintenance of barracks; the Ordnance Department which administered the Royal Irish Artillery Regiment and Engineers, while also ensuring the supply of small arms; the Army Medical Board (established in 1795); and the Army Accounts Office which was established by Cornwallis in 1799.²³⁵ The establishment also had an army 'commander of the forces' who was directly responsible to the lord lieutenant and not to the duke of the York, who was the commander-in-chief of the British army for most of the period. He was supported by a general staff that included an Adjutant General, Quarter Master General, Judge Advocate General and a Master General of Ordnance, as well as numerous clerks tasked with the daily correspondence required to administer the army.²³⁶

In 1793 the military force in Ireland was neither formidable in numbers nor quality. The official garrison strength of 15,000 men had never been reached but the importance Britain placed on Ireland was evident in that in 1792 a third of the regiments in the small British army were stationed in the kingdom.²³⁷ In January 1793 the establishment had only 10,199 troops recorded on the strength, which included 1,711 cavalry and 8,488 infantry.²³⁸ The garrison comprised of ordinary cavalry and

²³⁵ Martin, pp. 4-7

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815*, p. 153

²³⁸ 'Return of Effectives for January 1793,' State Papers Office (Ireland) 620/50/56, quoted in K.P. Ferguson, 'The Army in Ireland from the Restoration to the Act of Union', PhD thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1980, p. 149

infantry regiments of the line that had been mostly raised and recruited throughout Britain, as well a number of companies of the Royal Irish Artillery and detachments of invalids, soldiers who were no longer fit for active service but who were used to man the numerous harbour forts protecting Cork, Dublin and Waterford. There were very few locally raised Irish infantry regiments before 1793, with only the 18th (Royal Irish) and 27th (Inniskilling) regiments of foot being distinctive Irish infantry units in British service.²³⁹ This was most likely due to the official anti-Catholic recruiting policies of the British army throughout most of the 18th century that ensured that Irish recruiting generally occurred in the Protestant strong-holds of Ulster and the Pale (Dublin and its surrounding counties). However, much of the rank and file of a number of the cavalry regiments was raised within Ireland, with four of the dragoon regiments having served in the garrison for so long that they were collectively known as 'Irish Horse'.²⁴⁰

The cavalry regiments based in Ireland up until 1798 were considered to be of poor quality. This was generally due to a lack of active military service and inadequate training, supervision and leadership from officers. Regiments had been dispersed throughout the counties to provide small troop-sized garrisons for provincial towns, which negated essential regimental drill training, while it was common practice for officers to be absent from their troops while seeking a social life in the urban centres. The 12th Light Dragoons had been stationed continuously in Ireland from 1717, while the 13th and 14th Dragoons were actually raised in the kingdom and remained there until after the events of 1798.²⁴¹ This made the troops more susceptible to harbouring sympathies to the local population to which they were recruited from and had lived amongst for so long. The most recognised example of

²³⁹ Chart, p. 497

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Houlding, p. 353

this was the regiment of the 5th Dragoons that was disbanded in 1799 at the direction of the lord lieutenant, Charles, the Marquis Cornwallis, due to the sympathies held by a significant number of the Irish troops towards the plight of Irish rebels. Twenty troopers had been tried for high treason and desertion to the enemy during the rebellion, with a number shot or hanged. Many within the regiment were sworn United Irishmen who were in the habit of drinking seditious toasts and were insubordinate, affecting the discipline and reliability of the regiment.²⁴² General Sir Ralph Abercromby, appointed as commander-in-chief of the Irish military force in late 1797, was highly critical of the cavalry regiments as a result of his inspection of the army in Ireland shortly after his appointment. In his famous general order to the army of 26 February 1798, he singled out the cavalry: 'It is of utmost importance that the discipline of the dragoon regiments should be minutely attended to...and that they should be employed only...on military and indispensable business.'²⁴³ However, no measures to improve efficiency were implemented before the rebellion. In early 1798 Thomas Pelham, Camden's chief secretary, wrote to the duke of Portland describing the condition of the cavalry regiments stationed at the camp at Curragh. He claimed that the six regiments encamped there appeared to be 'perfectly ignorant of the new (cavalry) exercises' and that from one regiment alone '365 horses were lost or died in the course of two years, notwithstanding that no glanders or epidemic disorder appeared to have prevailed in that regiment.'²⁴⁴ Desertion and death from disease were also rife amongst the cavalry regiments during this period. Taking the above into consideration, it is no wonder that this branch of the service proved of little account against the insurgents.

²⁴² Ross, p. 422

²⁴³ McAnally, p. 323

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 118

The outbreak of war in 1793 led to further reductions in the number of regular troops in the Irish garrison. Due to its relatively small army, Britain struggled to provide sufficient troops to fulfil its commitments to the operations with its continental allies in Flanders and Holland, as well as to defend its possessions in the West Indies. The Relief Acts of 1792-1793 had provided the Irish government with the ability to raise a substantial permanent militia from the relatively untapped Catholic population to replace the regular infantry line regiments of the garrison which were desperately needed for overseas operations. This ensured that the Irish establishment was systematically stripped of the majority of its regular infantry. In August 1793 five regiments of infantry and three of cavalry, as well as two companies of the Royal Irish Artillery were transferred from Ireland for foreign service.²⁴⁵ By the end of 1794 most of the regular regiments that had formerly been part of the Irish establishment had been sent on active service, leaving only a small number of under-strength regular battalions that had been specifically sent to the kingdom to recruit. Once these units had recruited to full strength they were quickly posted to overseas theatres of operation. Between July 1793 and January 1798 the number of rank and file regular infantry in Ireland was significantly reduced from 11,094 to 1,830.²⁴⁶ However, the number of regular cavalry troops available for the defence of Ireland substantially increased. For the same period as above the number of regular rank and file troopers stationed in the kingdom increased from 2,793 to 3,943.²⁴⁷ It is most likely that the main reason the establishment maintained and augmented its cavalry force in Ireland was that the theatres of operations involving the British army at this time were not suitable for large scale mounted action. It was also thought at the time

²⁴⁵ State Papers Office (Ireland), 620/50/56, quoted in K.P. Ferguson, 'The Army in Ireland from the Restoration to the Act of Union', PhD thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1980, p. 149

²⁴⁶ Ibid

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

that mounted troops would be more suitable for internal policing operations due to the ability to respond quickly to areas of disturbance and the intimidation factor of cavalry against ill-disciplined civilians.²⁴⁸ The available cavalry numbers fluctuated slightly during this period; however, it was this arm of the regular army that the government was forced to heavily rely on to provide professionalism in the garrison.

Although war with France led to an immediate reduction in the number of regular infantry in Ireland, the period 1793 to 1798 saw an unprecedented rise in the available troops on the Irish establishment. Prior to the commencement of hostilities, in January 1793 the Irish garrison amounted to only 10,199 rank and file, consisting of 1,711 regular cavalry and 8,488 regular infantry.²⁴⁹ And although there is some minor discrepancy between these figures obtained from the State Papers Office (Ireland) and those in Table 4.1 taken from official Home Office returns, they gave an indication of the limited number of regular troops available in Ireland (Table 4.1) However, the demands of war led to a massive recruitment drive to bring the established regiments up to full strength of 600 men for foot regiments and 400 for cavalry. Once at full strength the regiments usually embarked for overseas service leaving a void in the garrison. The majority of the 38 new Irish militia regiments were quickly raised and were used to replace the regular infantry battalions, significantly augmenting the number of foot soldiers in Ireland. However, many in the Ascendancy questioned the reliability and loyalty of the untrained, inexperienced, and mostly Catholic, militiamen. To further increase the available troops for the defence of the kingdom, as well to provide a force to safeguard against any possible treasonable action by the militia, the Irish government sought the services of newly raised fencible cavalry and infantry from Britain.

²⁴⁸ Ibid

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

	Cavalry		Infantry		Militia	Yeomanry	Total
	<i>Regulars</i>	<i>Fencibles</i>	<i>Regulars</i>	<i>Fencibles</i>			
Jan. 1793	1,510		8,134				9,644
Jan. 1794	2,331		8,087		9,627		20,155
Jan. 1795	2,715	300	6,126	537	12,847		22,525
Jan. 1796	2,296	508	1,480	10,210	17,162		31,656
Jan. 1797	3,640	664	1,699	9,085	18,188		33,276
Jan. 1798	3,957	1,820	1,812	10,788	22,358	36,854	77,589
Jan. 1799	4,151	3,139	5,572	13,516	32,583	43,221	102,181
Jan. 1800	1,742	3,738	2,657	16,823	25,542	66,082	116,584

Table 4.1 - The armed forces of the crown in Ireland, 1 January 1793 to 1 January 1800

Sources: 'Return of the effective men in the British army stationed in Ireland,' Jan. 1793-Jan. 1806 (National Archive, Kew, HO 100/176/429); 'Numerical Strength of the Yeomanry, 1797-1799 (National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers 620/48/56)

Compared to the rapid augmentation of the army from 1793, there appears to have been only a small-scale programme of barrack building in Ireland prior to 1798. Permanent barracks were already established in strategic locations such as Belfast, Dublin, Cork, Londonderry, Galway and Duncannon Fort near Waterford, although some were in a poor state of repair. An Army Medical Board report issued in 1801 was highly critical of the general state of barracks in Ireland: 'Permanent and temporary barracks have been from necessity greatly over crowded,...many of these latter buildings are unfavourably placed, badly constructed and worse ventilated.'²⁵⁰ The issue of providing adequate accommodation for the troops did lead to the construction of a number of new barracks prior to the rebellion, such as Clonmel in 1793, Belfast and Island Bridge in 1797, and at Tralee in 1798, although the number of permanent barracks proved to be insufficient in some areas leading to the unpopular practice of billeting of troops amongst the local population.²⁵¹ In 1798 there was so little suitable accommodation for the 2,000 troops stationed between Cork and Limerick that it was suggested that two regiments should be encamped in

²⁵⁰ A. Aspinall & E.A. Smith (eds.), *English Historical Documents, 1783-1832* (London, 1959), p. 862, quoted in Martin, p. 9

²⁵¹ McAnally, pp. 62-63

tents on open ground.²⁵² What makes this so significant is that this region was identified as a likely location for a French invasion in 1796 and obviously inadequate measures had been taken to house the sizable force that was to garrison the area during the years of hostilities. However, it appears that a number of small barracks that could accommodate up to 100 men were established throughout the kingdom during the 1790s, either from the construction of new buildings or from modifications made to existing structures, in areas where insurgents were active. Typical of such buildings was Ross Castle where a single company of the Kerry Militia was stationed in 1797.²⁵³ What is obvious is, that prior to 1798, the military authorities in Ireland had failed to provide suitable and sufficient accommodation for the increasing number of troops in the kingdom, especially in regard to the fencible regiments sent from Britain.

Fencible regiments proved to be an essential element in the defence of the British Isles during the Revolutionary War and played a significant role in the defensive strategy of Ireland until their disbandment in 1802 as a result of the peace treaty of Amiens. Fencible cavalry and infantry regiments were initially raised in Britain as an emergency measure to supplement the war-time home-defence force. Civilians were enlisted for full-time service for a limited period, which was usually for the duration of hostilities, as opposed to the life-time service of the regular army that discouraged many to enlist. Units were quickly and easily raised due to the favourable conditions of length of service and the promise that recruits would not serve abroad. Between 1793 and 1802 approximately 34 regiments of fencible cavalry and 59 battalions of fencible infantry were raised, of which twelve cavalry and 34

²⁵² Lieutenant General Lake, 8 May 1798 (National Library of Ireland, Kilmainham Papers, Section 2, p. 179), quoted in Martin, p. 9

²⁵³ Nelson, p.85

infantry units were Scottish.²⁵⁴ Cavalry regiments usually consisted of 300 troopers, while infantry battalions had a full strength of 600 men. In all, twelve regiments of fencible cavalry, including four Scots units, and 34 battalions of fencible infantry served in Ireland during the period, with 21 of the infantry units being Scottish.²⁵⁵ This indicates that Scots played a significant role in the defence of Ireland during the period, where they equated to 33.3 percent of the fencible cavalry force and 61.7 percent of the fencible infantry.²⁵⁶

The negative view held by many British and Irish historians regarding the composition and efficiency of the regiments of fencibles that served in Ireland during this time is contentious. There were two fencible light dragoon cavalry units and at least one fencible infantry battalion raised in Ireland in 1795, with Camden reporting to the duke of Portland in July 1795 that he had recently inspected the newly raised Irish Fencible Regiment of Foot at Waterford.²⁵⁷ However, most fencible regiments that served in Ireland had been sent to the kingdom from Britain, beginning in April 1795, with the majority of them being of Scottish origin. Camden, though, took exception to three of the four regiments sent to Ireland in June of that year, which included two regular cavalry regiments and two fencible units, because three of them were entirely composed of Irishmen recruited in England.²⁵⁸ A lasting perception amongst traditional and nationalist historians is that, in general, fencibles were ill-disciplined, in poor physical health, and subject to committing atrocities against the civilian population. And although there is sufficient evidence to support these views regarding some particular regiments, there is also contemporary evidence to suggest

²⁵⁴ Carswell, pp. 155-159

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Camden to Portland, 8 July 1795 (National Archives, HO 100/55)

²⁵⁸ Fortescue, p. 519

that some individual units proved themselves to be of a proficient standard for the duties they were expected to perform.

There was much concern regarding the military effectiveness of a number of fencible regiments due to their generally poor physical condition and appearance prior to the rebellion in 1798. A recurring criticism was that a large number of the soldiers suffered from illnesses, were of a weak physical build and were not fit for service. In October 1795 General Robert Cunninghame, then commander-in-chief of the army in Ireland, received a report from Major General Sir James Duff concerning his recent inspection of the Perthshire Fencible Regiment. His observations were typical of the complaints regarding fencible units, stating the regiment was ‘composed of old men and young boys, few of either fit for His Majesty’s service.’²⁵⁹ He further stated that there was a high fatality rate within the regiment due to the want of proper clothing and that he ‘had not been able to prevail on the officers to have them clothed or to provide them with necessities, both of which they are...in want of.’ He concluded the report by stating the new recruits mostly proved to be unfit as well. The most extreme example is that of the Leicester Fencible Infantry Regiment that disembarked at Dublin in May 1795 but immediately had 80 percent of its men returned to England as unfit for service.²⁶⁰ The same month the Prince of Wales Fencibles arrived at the same port and were also sent back to Britain, as 396 out the 500-man battalion were considered unfit for duty due to being ‘too old, too fat, too small, too infirm and too young.’²⁶¹

The poor physical condition of these troops can be attributed to a number of factors. One explanation can be sought by examining where the majority of the recruits came from. The high death rate from natural causes of fencibles in Ireland,

²⁵⁹ General Robert Cunninghame to Edward Cooke, 10 October 1795 (National Archives, HO 100/55)

²⁶⁰ Carswell, p. 157

²⁶¹ Bartlett, ‘Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland 1793-1803,’ p. 259

which was five-times higher than the militia, led to an inquiry by the Army Medical Board into the disparity in mortality between the two forces. It concluded that the Irish militia generally comprised of 'stout men in the prime of life,' drawn from the peasantry and use to hard work and the Irish climate, whereas the British fencibles were 'either too young or unhealthy old men from unhealthy parts of Britain.'²⁶² Most of these men, especially those from England, had been artisans, mechanics and labourers recruited from over-crowded and unhealthy sprawling urban centres, and generally were less robust and strong compared to the majority of Catholic recruits of the Irish Militia who were mainly rural agricultural labourers.²⁶³ The fencibles were also prone to disease due to exposure to the unfamiliar climate and poor living conditions. Barracks were notoriously overcrowded and cold and damp during the winter months, which fostered numerous ailments. Duncannon Fort, near Waterford, was a typical example where the soldiers had to share three to a bed, which led to the rapid spread of fever and deaths.²⁶⁴

Ill-discipline was another major criticism aimed at the fencibles. This occurred due to a number of factors, which included lack of military experience, poor training, boredom and poor leadership. The service of the Perthshire Fencible infantry was an example of this where it appeared to suffer from poor recruiting and an open feud between its commanding officer and some his subordinate officers. This resulted in lax discipline, with the regiment behaving badly against the civilian population, especially after the defeat of the rebels in 1798.²⁶⁵ The actions of the battalion was considered so bad that in late 1798 Cornwallis ordered the disbandment of the

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Nelson, p. 130

²⁶⁴ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland 1793-1803,' p. 258

²⁶⁵ Carswell, p.157

regiment as an example to the rest of the army.²⁶⁶ Similarly to the Irish militia, the absence of officers from the fencible regiments reflected a lack of concern for their men and affected the efficiency and discipline of the troops when used in counter-insurgent operations, as well as garrison duty. This appears to have been a constant concern for the hierarchy of the army, with the military returns of October 1797 submitted by Lord Carhampton, then commander-in-chief of the army, showing that there were eight fencible officers reported absent-without-leave at that time.²⁶⁷ In comparison, the return states there were only three regular officers missing, but consideration must be given to the small number of regulars stationed in Ireland at this time. The same return reported that there were also eight militia officers absent from their battalions without authority. This tends to indicate that the attitudes and professionalism of the officer corps within the fencibles and militia was generally inferior in standard to that of regular officers, which reflected the standard of discipline displayed by their troops.

A number of atrocities were committed against the civilian population by individual fencible units that were instrumental in the lasting unfavourable reputation of the corps in Ireland. The most notorious unit was the Ancient British Light Dragoons, a Welsh fencible cavalry regiment commonly known as the ‘Ancient Britons.’ This regiment was stationed in Ulster and was involved in the combined counter-insurgent operations of 1797-1798. The officers and troops within the regiment proved ruthless towards the inhabitants of areas that were suspected of supporting the United Irishmen. In November 1797 Robert Livingstone, the agent of the zealous Protestant loyalist, Lord Charlemont, complained to his employer, that the Ancient Britons, accompanied by yeomanry, had wrecked property and

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Lord Carhampton to Camden, 19 October 1797 (National Archives, HO 100/68)

indiscriminately beaten inhabitants of Charlemont's estate in Armagh, while seizing all arms, including those of Protestants who had lawfully registered them.²⁶⁸ The counter-terror tactics used by the regiment were so severe that prominent loyalist gentry were repulsed by them. John Giffard, an Orangeman who commanded a detachment of Dublin militia during the Newry arms searches in County Down, was disgusted by the behaviour of the Ancient Britons and accompanying yeomen, who burnt houses, took prisoners and fired randomly at anyone they saw, killing up to twenty civilians who all subsequently proved to be innocent.²⁶⁹ The regiment was never officially held accountable for these murders, which may have attributed to the lasting unsavoury reputation of fencibles in Ireland.

However, contrary to popular tradition, there are a number of incidents where fencible units proved to be reliable and effective, especially during the rebellion in 1798. At the battle of Arklow, County Wicklow, on 9 June, the Loyal Durham Fencibles were positioned on the crucial right flank of the government forces defending the town and their actions were instrumental in repulsing and defeating the rebels.²⁷⁰ This proved decisive in that the large number of casualties suffered by the insurgents, forced them to withdraw and concentrate at Vinegar Hill where they were subsequently routed and destroyed, effectively ending the rebellion in Wexford. During the uprising in Ulster, where a substantial number of fencible units were stationed, the Loyal Tay Fencibles, a Scottish infantry battalion, proved most effective. The regiment had its headquarters at Carrickfergus, County Antrim, but the battalion had been dispersed into small platoon and company sized units to provide garrisons for outlying towns and villages. When the rebellion erupted in Antrim on 7

²⁶⁸ Livingstone to Lord Charlemont, 8 November 1797 (Historical Manuscripts Commission, Charlemont, vol. ii), pp. 310-311, quoted in Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 241

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Hayes-McCoy, 'The Government Forces Which Opposed the Irish Insurgents of 1798,' pp. 16-28

June, a small detachment of twenty Tay fencibles commanded by Lieutenant Andrew Small, together with a number of loyal armed civilians, successfully defended the town against a substantial rebel attack.²⁷¹ At Bellair another small detachment of Tay fencibles, together with the Glenarm yeomanry, took the initiative by seizing known United Irish leaders in a pre-emptive strike and subsequently defended the local castle.²⁷²

In general, the numerous Scottish regiments proved to be the most effective and reliable fencible troops in Ireland. The British government had capitalised on the traditional Highland relationships of loyalty to the crown which had developed since the defeat of the Scottish Jacobites in 1746 and had exploited the economic opportunities available to the landowners through the diminishing clan system by fostering patronage.²⁷³ Major Scottish landowners and minor gentry were offered political favour or military rank in return for raising battalions or recruiting troops from their estates. An example of this is the 2nd Regiment of Argyle Fencibles, raised by Colonel Archibald McNeil of Colonsay from his estates in the Western Isles.²⁷⁴ These policies ensured that whole regiments of fit and active young men could be quickly formed, with five of the seven Scottish regiments raised in 1793 being Highland units.²⁷⁵ However, some of these corps were not solely 'Highland' in composition as their titles suggest, with regiments increasingly being forced to recruit in lowland areas where the population was always greater and, in the 1790s, expanding.²⁷⁶ The traditional relationships between the Highland officers and their men, together with their cultural respect for military service, ensured that these troops

²⁷¹ Stewart, p. 88

²⁷² Ibid., p. 98

²⁷³ Stuart Reid, *Wellington's Highlanders* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 22-24

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Carswell, p. 157

had the potential to be excellent soldiers once trained. The Reay Fencibles, raised from the north-west of Scotland, were particularly well thought of due to their fair treatment of the local population and appear to have remained untainted by acts of atrocity or indiscipline.²⁷⁷ The Highland soldiers were generally physically hard, which made them well suited to the types of counter-insurgent operations that followed the rebellion, such as pursuing rebels into remote and mountainous terrain. An example was the service of the Dumbartonshire Fencibles, included in an elite mobile force which received praise from Sir John Moore after he had led the campaign against insurgents in the Wicklow Mountains in late 1798: 'the fatigue and inconvenience of the troops has been very great. In the mountains of Wicklow we are obliged to divest ourselves of all baggage, and for a week, notwithstanding hard rain and cold, lay on the ground without tents or covering.'²⁷⁸

Cultural and religious beliefs affected how the Scottish Fencibles reacted to their duties in Ireland. Some regiments initially refused to serve in the kingdom and mutinied when they were about to embark for Ireland, although, such protest was quickly quelled with the arrest of ring-leaders.²⁷⁹ The majority of Lowland regiments were recruited from Protestants, ensuring many of the officers and soldiers could identify with the Protestant population, especially the Presbyterians of Ulster. This was evident through the establishment of Orange lodges within numerous battalions, which would have fostered strong partisan feelings towards rebels or suspected rebels. It is likely that such attitudes would have led to incidents of ruthless behaviour and possible atrocities against civilians, similar to those committed by local yeomanry and Irish militia in Ulster in 1797 and during the rebellion of 1798, by units that were susceptible to ill-discipline. The Reay Fencibles, a predominantly Protestant regiment,

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 158

²⁷⁸ Beatrice Brownrigg, *The Life and Letters of Sir John Moore* (Oxford, 1923), pp. 82-84

²⁷⁹ Carswell, p. 158

enthusiastically sent sergeants to act as drill-masters to the newly-formed Protestant yeomanry corps in Belfast in 1796.²⁸⁰ However, the relationship between this regiment and the predominantly Catholic Monaghan Militia that was also stationed in Belfast at the time almost led to open conflict. This was reportedly due to the militia regiment suspected of having been subverted by the United Irishmen.²⁸¹ However, even Scottish units were not immune from such activity, with two soldiers from the Fife Fencibles being executed at Carrickfergus in 1797 for taking the United Irish oath.²⁸² In contrast, some Scots felt sympathy towards the situation of the Catholic population. The Glengarry Fencibles, a Highland regiment that was composed largely of Catholics and even had its own priest, was well regarded for its humane treatment of the population of Wexford during and after the uprising.²⁸³

The reputation of the Highland fencible regiments has unjustifiably been linked to the poor press that fencibles, as a whole, have received from nationalist historians, mainly due to their role in the pacification of Ulster. The Scottish fencibles were a more complex and varied force compared to the generally substandard regiments from other parts of Britain. And although the Lowland regiments generally proved to be of a less physical quality than Highland counterparts, the Scottish fencibles remained a loyal and effective military force during the times of crisis in Ireland. In contrast to England and Ireland, Scotland had no official militia prior to 1797 and it is probable that this accounted for the Scottish fencibles, in general, attracting a better class of recruit than their English counterparts. The Scots soldiers were credited with displaying remarkably good behaviour towards the civilian population. Obviously, this was not always the case, with a number of isolated

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid

²⁸³ Ibid.

unsavoury incidents involving individuals from particular regiments having been recorded. However, the Scottish fencibles appear to have constituted a relatively disciplined force at a time when regular troops in Ireland were desperately in short supply. A significant indication of the quality and regard held by military authorities for some Scottish fencible regiments was the number that were recruited into regular regiments when the fencibles were disbanded in 1802, with some units enlisting *en mass* while they were still stationed in Ireland.²⁸⁴

Between 1793 and 1815 Ireland proved to be a crucial source of recruits for the regular forces of the British army. During this period it is estimated that approximately 150,000 Irishmen enlisted, with the majority serving in regular regiments posted overseas.²⁸⁵ The heavy recruiting conducted in the kingdom during the 1790s led to an estimated one-third of the British army being comprised of Irishmen, with an even higher rate being achieved during the later Napoleonic wars.²⁸⁶ In the period 1793-1794 as many as 30 new regular regiments were raised in Ireland or from the 44 independent companies that were recruited in Ireland and subsequently sent to Britain to be formed into battalions.²⁸⁷ Although most of the troops raised in Ireland at this time were infantrymen recruited from rural peasants and poor urban artisans, four new regular cavalry regiments were raised from the more affluent farming classes. These regiments were subsequently numbered as the 30th to the 34th Light Dragoons.²⁸⁸ Once the battalions in Ireland had been recruited to full strength they were immediately posted out of the kingdom, most never to return. The two main reasons for this can be attributed to the desperate need to boost the number of troops available to defend Britain and its overseas possessions, as well

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 159

²⁸⁵ Chart, p. 516

²⁸⁶ Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815*, p. 154

²⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 498-499

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 503

as to build a substantial army for operations against the French on the continent. However, this policy was also actively supported by the Irish Ascendancy who were against the stationing of new regular units in Ireland, as they were mainly comprised of Catholic recruits who posed a potential armed threat to the Protestant oligarchy. The experience of the 88th Foot, commonly known as the ‘Connaught Rangers,’ (English spelling) was typical of regular regiments established in Ireland. Raised from mainly within the counties of Connacht in 1793 by the Honourable John de Burgh, once it had reached its full complement it was immediately shipped to England and the following year sent to Flanders as part of the duke of York’s army.²⁸⁹

Desertion was another reason to remove the Irish troops from the kingdom. The insatiable demand for soldiers led to a rapid expansion of the armed forces in Ireland in 1793, which ensured deterioration in the quality of recruits. In 1794 a memorandum on recruiting claimed that ‘the worst kind of recruits’ were being accepted into the army: either inexperienced young men’ or the ‘refuse of mankind.’²⁹⁰ It was recruits such as these that caused the desertion rate to drastically increase, with Edward Cooke, the under-secretary at Dublin Castle, stating in June 1794 ‘Desertion is terrible at present...and we know not how to prevent it.’²⁹¹ Cooke’s frustration was supported by the comments of the new lord lieutenant, Lord Fitzwilliam, a few months later: ‘There is no keeping Irish troops in Ireland, they desert so abominably.’²⁹² An example of evidence supporting these claims is a report submitted by Colonel E.P. Trench in May 1794 where he states that when he inspected his regiment at Granard, County Westmeath, 233 men had deserted out of a

²⁸⁹ Shepperd, p. 8

²⁹⁰ National Archives, HO 100/47/ 272-274, quoted in Thomas Bartlett, ‘Indiscipline and disaffection in Ireland in the 1790s,’ in *Radicals, Rebels & Establishments*, ed. Patrick J. Corish (Belfast, 1985), p. 116

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² HO 100/48/429, quoted in Bartlett, ‘Indiscipline and disaffection in Ireland in the 1790s’

total complement of 1,100 and he may have lost more while marching to their port of embarkation.²⁹³ The inability to adjust to the discipline and rigours of military life would certainly have affected many recruits who may never have ventured more than a few miles from their family home or village and chose to desert. However, there is evidence to suggest that desertion rates rose once the overseas destinations for departing regiments were announced.

Prior to 1798 most regular regiments raised in Ireland were sent for service in the West Indies. From 1793 Dundas, as secretary of state for war, constantly received requests for troops from generals commanding the various islands that extended throughout the region, where tropical diseases such as yellow fever and malaria continued to decimate the regiments stationed there, reducing the capacity to effectively defend British interests. Britain was highly protective of its possessions in the Caribbean as the production of raw materials from these islands, especially sugar, were essential in maintaining the booming British economy. Profits and taxes raised from these commodities were also essential in financing the war against Revolutionary France, not only for the maintenance of the Royal Navy and the British army, but also to provide the subsidies that Britain was paying to its allies to help the fight against the French on the continent. There were never enough available troops to satisfy the insatiable demand for replacements in the Caribbean. The British government was forced to prioritise and juggle around what troops it had, including withdrawing regiments from its small army in the Netherlands. However, even this move proved insufficient and more drastic measures to find the required forces was needed. Pitt and Dundas were now forced to look to Ireland to help solve this issue.

²⁹³ HO 100/48/306, quoted in Bartlett, 'Indiscipline and disaffection in Ireland in the 1790s'

Ireland proved to be a significant source of regular troops sent to the West Indies. Britain was determined to establish dominance in the Caribbean by not only retaining its own possessions, but also by depriving France of the islands under its control. To this end Dundas intended to commit a further 10,000 men to the West Indian campaign season of 1794-95 to complete the conquest of Guadeloupe.²⁹⁴ In 1793, Dundas had already ordered the flank companies of all the remaining infantry regiments in Ireland to embark for service in expeditions to Toulon and Gibraltar, as well as the West Indies. In November of the same year, he sent two regiments to the Caribbean from the Irish Establishment, followed by another ten battalions the following year for the Guadeloupe campaign.²⁹⁵ These units were initially sent to Gibraltar to acclimatise before heading to the tropical islands. According to Lieutenant General Sir Charles Grey, the officer commanding the British forces in the Windward Islands, these troops 'were the pick of the Irish army and ... it was unlikely that such excellent soldiers could ever be assembled again in the war.'²⁹⁶ Although this may be some exaggeration on Grey's part, there is no doubt that these troops were the most professional element of the Irish establishment and their overseas posting had a serious effect on the defensive capability of the army in Ireland. By the end of 1794, the 17th Foot was the only regular infantry line regiment remaining on the Irish establishment, with four light dragoon regiments also being ordered to prepare for service in the West Indies in April the following year.²⁹⁷ Britain's focus on the Caribbean ensured that the cream of the Irish army was to quickly waste away through campaigning and tropical disease that ensured most of

²⁹⁴ Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France*, (Oxford, 1987), p. 127

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 63

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 159

these Irish soldiers never returned to their homeland. It was the military experience in the West Indies that also dramatically affected further recruiting in Ireland.

By the mid 1790s, the fear of serving in the Caribbean led to a reduction in Irish recruits volunteering for the regular army. News of the high mortality rate of troops serving in the West Indies had quickly filtered back to Britain and Ireland, so that by 1796, those cadres of British regiments sent to recruit in the kingdom were struggling to reach their full complement. Those units were usually seriously under strength and were shipped to Ireland to enlist recruits within the shortest time possible before embarking for foreign service. In July 1795, four English regiments were sent to Ireland to recruit to full strength and were secretly destined to be re-numbered before being sent to the West Indies. These intentions were kept from the troops to prevent any desertion.²⁹⁸ However, the information was leaked resulting in the 3-day mutiny of the 104th and 111th Foot in Dublin in August 1795 and the mutiny of the 105th and 113th Foot at Cork in September. The mutineers had taken to the streets fully armed in protest, declaring that their conditions of enlistment, which included not having to serve outside Ireland or Britain, and been broken.²⁹⁹ And although these mutinies were quickly extinguished by militia, aided by small contingents of available regulars, news of the events and why they occurred spread throughout the country.

The demand for troops became so critical that Pitt turned to desperate measures. In 1794 he proposed the formation of an 'Irish Brigade' of six battalions of infantry to be raised from within the Catholic population of Ireland, specifically for service in the West Indies. This formation was to be officered by those members of the Irish Catholic peerage and gentry who had previously fought against Britain while serving in the Irish Brigade in French service, but who were now considered allies

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 173

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

due to their continued allegiance to the French royal family.³⁰⁰ These officers were to be given the rank that they had previously held in French service.³⁰¹ Remarkably, the most senior colonel of the proposed battalions was the duke of Fitzjames, an illegitimate descendant of James II and thereby considered a senior Jacobite. However, by this stage of the century Jacobitism no longer posed a military threat to the Hanoverian dynasty, with most Irish Jacobites now willing to show allegiance to the British crown. But, even these formations struggled to recruit to their full complement, with the duke of Portland in February 1796 showing his concern at the inability of the officers to find sufficient recruits to bring their battalions to full strength: 'I am willing to hope that the zeal and gratitude of his Roman Catholic subjects will render it unnecessary (to reduce the regiments) and that their exertions to fulfil his Majesty's just expectations will correspond with the means which his Majesty's paternal goodness has afforded them of distinguishing themselves in the service of their country and of being placed in such honourable and advantageous posts of trust and profit as their merits will entitle them to enjoy in common with the rest of their fellow subjects of every other religious persuasion.'³⁰² Even this direct threat by Portland proved powerless in raising the brigade to full strength. As a result, only the two numerically strongest regiments, Dillon's and Walsh's (commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Edward Stack), saw service in the West Indies. When they embarked from Cork in May 1796, the regimental return showed Walsh's battalion having only 495 rank and file, which was well below the official required strength of 600, although the troops were described as being a good body of men, some having long service and being more forward in discipline and drill than others.³⁰³ However,

³⁰⁰ Camden to Portland, 14 July 1795 (National Archives, HO 100/55)

³⁰¹ Portland to Camden, 16 February 1796 (National Archives, HO 100/55)

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Camden to Portland, 8 March 1796 (National Archives, HO 100/55)

by 1797 the Irish Brigade was disbanded due to the inability to muster sufficient recruits, with the rank and file being drafted into other regiments, while the officers were placed on half-pay.

There were also other factors that led to fewer Irish recruits 'taking the king's shilling' in the line regiments. The formation of the militia in 1793 had provided prospective volunteers with an alternative to joining a regular regiment. For many, especially married men, there were more incentives to enlist in a county militia battalion. By 1795, the experiences of the regular line regiments that had been decimated by disease through service in the West Indies were common knowledge throughout Ireland and the prospect of serving in a militia regiment that was to remain in the kingdom was more attractive. For married recruits, service in a line battalion would have meant overseas service and certain separation from family for an indefinite time, with any dependants facing destitution in the likely event that the recruit was killed in battle, died from wounds or disease, or was crippled from serious wounds. Home service with the militia offered soldiers more incentives such as limited service, a healthier climate, the option to have family remain with the battalion and live in barracks, allowances for a spouse and dependant children, regimental schools provided for children, as well as only a small chance of having to face an enemy in open combat.³⁰⁴ Also, by this period internal civil unrest was reaching a level previously unknown during the 18th century. Protestants felt threatened by the increasingly violent activities of the United Irishmen and the disaffected Catholic peasantry in rural areas.³⁰⁵ This, coupled with the general lack of trust in the militia, ensured that many Protestants believed their military efforts were best served by falling back on their tradition of self-defence by forming local armed

³⁰⁴ Nelson, pp. 145-146

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

associations. Evidence of the effects of this can be seen in a letter from Camden to Portland in March 1796 where he stated that he had ordered cavalry recruiting parties to England due to the lack of recruits, which had previously enlisted from within Protestant communities, coming forward in Ireland.³⁰⁶ Eventually thousands of prospective Protestant recruits, who may have enlisted in the regular army, enthusiastically joined the newly-established yeomanry in late 1796. Clearly, the threat of internal rebellion and the prospect of losing property and power was more important to the Protestant population in Ireland than any international politics.

The divided military defence policies for Ireland up until 1798 determined the distribution and use of the armed forces in the kingdom. From the outbreak of war with Revolutionary France in 1793, the British government was mindful of an attempted invasion of Ireland by French forces at a time when the regular troops from the Irish establishment were desperately needed elsewhere. With the substantial reduction of regular infantry from the Irish garrison, heavy reliance was placed on the Royal Navy to intercept and defeat any French invasion force intended for Ireland.³⁰⁷ Until 1796, the general attitude of the British government was that although an invasion attempt was possible, it was unlikely due to the poor state of the French navy.³⁰⁸ This attitude was reflected in the inadequate defensive planning of the military in Ireland and the general poor state of the armed forces that was influenced by political interference. The army had always had the dual purpose in Ireland to assist the civil powers when called upon and to defend against invasion.³⁰⁹ However, it was the political influence of the Protestant ascendancy that was determined to retain power and the increased fear of rebellion that saw the army being used more as

³⁰⁶ Camden to Portland, 24 March 1796 (National Archives, HO 100/60)

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Come, pp. 174-188

³⁰⁹ S.J. Connelly, 'The defence of Protestant Ireland,' in *A Military History of Ireland*, eds. Thomas Bartlett & Keith Jeffrey (Cambridge, 1996), p. 241

a tool against insurgents. This ensured that the majority of the available troops of the garrison were distributed in small contingents throughout the kingdom rather than concentrated as an effective fighting force.

The policies of the lords lieutenant and their local advisors determined the distribution of the garrison. The problem that Dublin Castle faced in the 1790s was that it had insufficient forces to both effectively combat insurgency in the countryside and defend against invasion. During their terms as lords lieutenant, both Westmorland and Camden were focussed on counter-insurgent measures. This ensured that the duties of the army changed so that it was vigorously used against the population that it was suppose to be defending. To counter any local loyalties, the militia regiments were not to be stationed in their counties of origin and were generally rotated from localities on an annual basis. Typical examples including the Tyrone Militia that was stationed in the western military district in 1797, the southern district in 1798, the central district in 1799 and eastern district in 1800; the Kerry Militia had a similar experience, being stationed in the northern district in 1797, the western district in 1798 and posted to the central district in 1800. Some regiments, such as the Roscommon and Galway militias, remained in the same districts for the above period but were annually transferred to different locations within that district.³¹⁰ Until after the events of 1798, there appears to be no particular pattern to as to where militia regiments were posted, with the militia consisting of 77 percent of the armed forces in the southern district, 61 percent of the forces in the eastern district and 35 percent of the government troops in the northern district.³¹¹ As the capital and seat of government, Dublin accounted for the largest concentration of troops as the security of the capital remained imperative. In 1796 its garrison consisted of one regiment of

³¹⁰ K.P. Ferguson, 'The army in Ireland from the restoration to the act of Union,' PhD. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1980, p. 181

³¹¹ Nelson, p. 182

dragoons, one regiment of fencibles and three regiments of militia, while the nearby camp at Loughlinstown had a similar complement which also included several companies of artillery.³¹² The low percentage of militia regiments within the garrison of Ulster was due to the battalions being predominantly Catholic regiments from southern counties, which General Lake feared would be susceptible to subversion from the United Irish.³¹³ This ensured that the majority of the security force in Ulster consisted of fencible regiments and some of the few regular units left in Ireland. However, every county in the kingdom had a militia regiment stationed in it, with most of the battalions being dispersed amongst small towns and villages. It is arguable how effective this policy proved in policing against insurgent activities, but it is most certain that it hindered the necessary training to establish the militia as an effective fighting force in the eventuality of any invasion.

Political interference further hindered the military command in Ireland during the 1790s. The nature of the Irish government was such that its civil and military affairs were integrated. The lord lieutenant's dual responsibilities as the senior civil and military leader led to Camden relenting to pressure from the Ascendancy, ensuring that the army was divided in its primary functions. This came to a head with the resignation of Abercromby in March 1798, mainly through his criticism of the state of the army, but also through his frustration with Camden's weakness in cowing to the constant appeals from the gentry for troops to provide protection for themselves and their property.³¹⁴ Abercromby had been critical of the dispersal of the army and believed that it could only be forged into an effective counter-invasion force by concentrating the regiments. This philosophy was in complete contrast to his predecessor, Carhampton, who was also a member of the Irish parliament, and Lake,

³¹² Camden to Portland, 21 March 1796 (National Archives, HO 100/60)

³¹³ Nelson, p. 182

³¹⁴ Brownrigg, p. 77

who was to replace him. Both men were zealous advocates of the Ascendancy cause and were applauded for their vigorous counter-insurgency operations in Connacht and Ulster prior to the rebellion.³¹⁵ Cornwallis had the same opinion as Abercromby when he became the lord lieutenant, and unlike Camden, he generally refused to bow to the constant demands of the Protestant oligarchy.³¹⁶ However, such change in policies and attitudes within the high command led to confusion within the lower levels of the army. Officers and soldiers who had actively been encouraged to administer severe punishments on disaffected populations were then expected to show more leniency for the months Abercromby was in command, only to revert to their previous tactics when Lake was appointed.³¹⁷ The counter-terror tactics were also advocated by many colonels of militia regiments, who as members of the Ascendancy were able to combine their military and political influence to protect their own interests. One example was General John Knox, who as a member of the leading family in County Tyrone, used his political connections to promote the establishment of various yeomanry corps within the county when there were insufficient troops to protect his extensive estates.³¹⁸ Ultimately, the official use of 'terror' by the army was dictated by who was in command at the time, and the political influences and ideologies of those commanders. The underlying political subordination within the Irish establishment was lessened with the appointment of Cornwallis in 1798.

The counter-insurgent operations of the Irish army limited its effectiveness. The dispersal of individual regiments into company, troop and small squad-sized formations throughout the country prevented the continued training required to ensure the soldiers and their officers reached and maintained a proficient level of military

³¹⁵ S.J. Connelly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, 4th edition (Oxford, 2004), p. 308

³¹⁶ Ross, pp. 395

³¹⁷ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland 1793-1803,' p. 276

³¹⁸ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 93

professionalism. Such training was not only essential for the militia and fencible regiments that did not have a cadre of experienced officers and NCOs, with the units having little opportunity to instil discipline or encourage *esprit de corps* within the battalions, but also for the few weak regular regiments in the kingdom that were reliant on reaching full strength through recruiting in Ireland. In isolated locations where there were no established barracks, what discipline there was within regiments was soon eroded through troops being billeted in homes of the local population, which on occasions could be 20-30 miles from the company or battalion headquarters preventing supervision from officers.³¹⁹ Military advisors at Dublin Castle were fully aware of the detrimental effects detached service was having on the army and sought to rectify matters by establishing a number of training camps throughout the kingdom. In April 1795 Camden became the new lord lieutenant and proposed the establishment of summer camps to provide the required battalion and brigade training for the infantry of the regular, fencible and militia battalions. It was proposed that training would be conducted on a seasonal rotation system where eventually every individual battalion would spend around three months experiencing large formation drill. However, the logistics of implementing the system proved daunting, with Camden complaining in June of 1796 that although there were near 40,000 men in Ireland at the time, the troops were so scattered that only 6,700 could be spared to attend the training camps.³²⁰ There is insufficient contemporary data to establish every unit that attended the summer camps, but taking into consideration that there was only a small percentage of troops available to do so in 1796, and probably even less the following year due to the increase in insurgent activities, it is likely that a significant proportion

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 79

³²⁰ Camden to Pelham, 28 June 1796 (National Archives, HO 100/64)

of the Irish army had no more than basic musket and platoon drill at the time of the rebellion.

The counter-insurgent operations had a negative effect on the discipline of the army in Ireland. Some troops became demoralised through the constant use in excessive policing roles within the communities they were required to live. Lord Carhampton, commander-in-chief of the army in 1795, directed a swift and ruthless campaign against Defenders in Connacht that year that set the tone of future operations. Draconian measures were taken where homes were indiscriminately burned, livestock slaughtered and many Defender suspects were imprisoned without trial, some being unlawfully pressed into service in the Royal Navy.³²¹ The inability or hesitance of the local magistrates to enforce the rule of law at the time, and later in some counties of Ulster in 1797, effectively saw martial law declared through the Insurrection Act. This provided the army with extended powers for search for arms and ability to impose curfews, with troops being authorised to act in dispersing unlawful assemblies if there was no magistrate present.³²² It is easy to see how the morale of the troops could be affected by such operations, especially the Irish Catholics who could have some empathy with the plight of the Defender suspects, when they were given orders such as those by Sir John Moore. When conducting search and seizure operations for weapons in early 1798 he directed his men 'to treat the people with as much harshness as possible, as far as words and manners went, and to supply themselves with whatever provisions were necessary to enable them to live well.'³²³ Moore's approach can be considered moderate compared to others, such as

³²¹ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 248

³²² General Order, 18 May 1797 (National Library of Ireland, Kilmainham Papers 1013/352), quoted in Nelson, p. 137

³²³ Sir John Moore, *Diary*, ed. Major General Sir J.F. Maurice (London, 1904), p. 289, quoted in Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty: The bloody story of the great Irish Rebellion of 1798* (London, 1972), p. 77

General Whyte who at the direction of General Lake, ordered the Monaghan Militia to destroy the offices of the newspaper, the *Northern Star*, in Belfast because of its sympathies towards the republican cause.³²⁴ It was such direction from senior officers that promoted excesses by the troops and fostered a breakdown in discipline.

The attempted invasion by the French at Bantry Bay in December 1796 exposed the incompetence of the army command at that time. Prior to this there had been no comprehensive defensive plan, as it was felt that the French navy was too weak to support a substantial invasion, with Dublin Castle placing heavy reliance on the Royal Navy to intercept any French fleet intended for Ireland.³²⁵ This false sense of security had ensured that only rudimentary plans had been formulated. In March 1796 Camden sought authority from Portland to establish the training camps at Blaris, Loughlinstown and Ardfinnan on a permanent basis as part of a defensive strategy. He argued that it was essential to defend Dublin and that a large body of men should be stationed in the near vicinity.³²⁶ The military thought at this time was that the most likely areas the French would land would either be in the south, where there were a number of substantial harbours to help establish a bridgehead, or in the north that also had sizable harbours and where disaffection was strongest. It was thought unlikely that any landing would take place on the west coast due to its unforgiving coastline. Camden argued that the camps would have a dual purpose of providing essential formation training as well as providing concentrated reserves that could react to any invasion or rebellion in these regions.

However, from examining Camden's proposed changes to the garrison for the summer of 1796, it is clear that the size and experience of these reserves was limited.

The Dublin garrison comprised 2,250 men from one fencible and three militia

³²⁴ Bartlett, 'Indiscipline and disaffection in the armed forces in Ireland in the 1790s,' p. 127

³²⁵ Paul M. Kerrigan, *Castles and Fortifications in Ireland, 1485-1945* (Cork, 1995), pp. 150-151

³²⁶ Camden to Portland, 26 March 1796 (National Archives, HO 100/60)

battalions, with the 9th Dragoons providing the only regular regiment.³²⁷ A further 1,830 men were to provide support from the one fencible and three militia regiments stationed at nearby Loughlinstown. The reserves at Ardfinnin and Blaris camps only equated to 2,740 and 2,260 respectively, and were comprised on a similar number of fencible and militia battalions such as that at Loughlinstown, although it is believed that small contingents of artillery were also based at these camps.³²⁸ Significantly, there were no regular units to provide stability to these reserves. At this time there were only six cavalry and two infantry regiments of the line on the Irish establishment and they had been posted throughout the kingdom. And although Camden's proposal shows he intended to have some concentration of forces at Cork, Belfast and Dublin, generally the army was too dispersed throughout the country to allow for a substantial force to rapidly come together to meet any threat.

There also appeared to be a lack of planning on the part of the high command at this time. In October 1796, Ireland was divided up into five military districts in an attempt to simplify the management of the army. Each district, Northern (Ulster), Western (Connacht and part of Munster), Midland, Eastern (Leinster) and Southern (Munster and part of south-west Leinster) was to be commanded by a general who was responsible for the troops and military activities in his area. This was followed by a general order that directed the brigading together of regiments for training and emergencies, although it appears this only occurred on an ad-hoc basis.³²⁹ Evidence of poor planning or incompetence on the part of the military leadership came from within the army itself. In early December, at a time when the government had intelligence of an impending French invasion, Brigadier General Eyre Coote had written to his superior, Lieutenant General William Dalrymple, indicating Bantry Bay

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ General Order, 26 October 1796 (National Archives, WO 68/221/28), quoted in Nelson, p. 162

as a suitable and likely strategic landing place for the French and that steps should be taken to plan for such eventuality.³³⁰ However, Dalrymple, who was in command of the forces in the southern district, was not in a position to take such steps until any such landing was confirmed, although he did make a token gesture in ordering a detachment of the 5th Dragoons to the area.³³¹ His main priority was the defence of Cork and its harbour, which appeared to be a challenge with the insufficient resources available. This was outlined in a report submitted the same month by Major Brown of the Royal Engineers, who stated that there were crucial problems in the defence of the city due to insufficient artillerymen and infantry, as well as incomplete defences.³³² Considering that Cork was regarded as the second city of the kingdom and its port was crucial to Britain's overall strategy, the lack of resources and poor planning for its defence gives some indication of the insufficient planning conducted for the defence from invasion for the rest of the Ireland.

The attempted invasion of Ireland by the French in December 1796 posed the most serious military threat to Ireland during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. A substantial French fleet of eighteen ships-of-the-line, thirteen frigates, seven transports and eight smaller vessels had sailed from Brest on 16 December 1796 carrying 14,450 regular troops, 41,644 stands of arms and 5,000 uniforms.³³³ This formidable force was under the command of General Louis Hoche, an experienced officer who had recently defeated the Royalist uprising in the Vendee. Another French army of 14-15,000 men was assembling in Brest to reinforce Hoche's

³³⁰ Coote to Dalrymple, 1 December 1796 (Public Record Office, Northern Ireland, T 755/3/199), quoted in Nelson, p. 162

³³¹ Martin, p. 262

³³² Report of Major Brown, RE, December 1796 (PRO, NI, T 755/3/209), quoted in Nelson, p. 162

³³³ Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven & London, 1982), p. 111

proposed invasion.³³⁴ The mouth of the River Shannon was the original proposed landing area for the French army. However, the fleet became dispersed due to a storm and unfavourable winds prevented it from reassembling. As a result only 35 ships arrived off Bantry Bay on 21 December, excluding the ship carrying Hoche. The fleet then divided in two, with nineteen ships remaining outside the bay while the rest entered it. Another storm several days later scattered the ships at the head of the bay, reducing the fleet to sixteen ships. This ensured that the French now only had an available force of 6,500 troops and four artillery pieces to establish a bridgehead. For a time indecision prevailed amongst the French as Hoche and the naval commander, Admiral Morard de Galles, who were together on the same frigate, had failed to rendezvous with the main fleet due to unfavourable winds.³³⁵ However, although a decision was eventually made by General Grouchy, the most senior army officer present, to land this force in an attempt to capture Cork, continued rough weather prevented a landing. The naval commander, Bouvet, fearing being trapped in the bay by the Royal Navy, decided to withdraw the fleet on 25 December and returned to France.³³⁶ Noted Irish military historian Paul Kerrigan argues that had it not been for the weather, the French could have marched to Cork in four days and easily captured the city and port, as the inadequate and inexperienced defending force of regulars, fencibles and militia would have been no match for the invaders.³³⁷

The military response to the arrival of the French in Bantry Bay was chaotic. The operation to mobilise a force to counter the expected landing was poorly run by army staff that had been surprised by the arrival of the sizable French force. Although any unlikely invasion was expected to be in the south, the majority of the military

³³⁴ Martin, pp. 252-253

³³⁵ Paul M. Kerrigan, *Castles and Fortifications in Ireland, 1485-1945*, p. 151

³³⁶ Marianne Elliott, 'The Role of Ireland in French War Strategy, 1796-1798,' in *Ireland and the French Revolution*, eds. Hugh Gough & David Dickinson (Dublin, 1990), pp. 209-210

³³⁷ Kerrigan, *Castles and Fortifications in Ireland, 1485-1945*, p. 151

forces were stationed in Ulster and in the east to protect Dublin. This clearly indicates that the government's emphasis was more on countering insurgency which was presenting an immediate danger than preparing for an invasion that may never have eventuated. It was not until 1797 that General David Dundas, who believed that any French invasion would most likely occur along the southern coast or near the Shannon estuary in the west, formulated a plan of defence that focused on defending strategic geographical boundaries such as the River Shannon in the west and the rivers Lee and Blackwater in the south. Dalrymple admitted that he had not formulated any plan for the defence of Cork and that the insufficient and inexperienced force that he had gathered together to meet the French was only a diversion to allow time for a sizable army to be concentrated.³³⁸ At the time he had no more than approximately 5,600 troops, comprising mostly of militia and fencibles, to defend the whole southern district, but believed he could only muster around 2,000 to challenge the French near Bandon.³³⁹ Confusion reigned amongst the military hierarchy, which lacked inspiration from the commander-in-chief, Carhampton, who conceded that Cork and Limerick might be captured by the French.³⁴⁰ Regiments were ordered south to establish a concentrated force near Cork, but Carhampton wrote to Pelham stating that he believed no more than 8,000 men could be collected together in time to defend the city and that it might be better to form a strong defensive line at Fermoy on the River Blackwater, where a force of 12,000 infantry supported by cavalry and artillery would be more effective.³⁴¹ Thirty-one of the 38 militia regiments were mobilised and moved south, leaving the policing of most of the country to the fledgling and

³³⁸ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 269

³³⁹ Martin, p. 262

³⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 262-263

³⁴¹ Ibid.

inexperienced yeomanry.³⁴² However, no proper system had been adopted for troop movements which saw many regiments making disorganised forced-marches in the middle of winter. There had been little or no provision made for feeding the troops on the march, with most having to improvise by buying their own food or by relying on the generosity of the civilian population.³⁴³ The important part the population played during this time was emphasized by Dalrymple in a letter published in the *Dublin Journal* where he stated that the inhabitants were ‘displaying every proof of loyalty and attachment’ to the troops.³⁴⁴ The military authorities had been anxious about a possible invasion from September 1796 and had taken some measures. Supply depots were established at Clonmel, Bandon, Galway, Banagher, Portumna, Omagh, Hillsborough, Newry and Dundalk, while ovens had been built at Athlone, Birr and Omagh.³⁴⁵ However, these proved insufficient during the emergency. There were deficiencies evident in medical services and artillery supplies, with the commissariat being incapable of providing enough food and fodder for the troops and horses.³⁴⁶ Clearly, the Bantry Bay crisis highlighted the complacency of the leadership and inadequate planning that the Irish army and government needed to address.

However, the condition of the army in Ireland prior to the rebellion in 1798 remained poor. Lord Carhampton had lost the confidence of the majority of his subordinate officers, as well as Camden, who eventually was to replace him with General Sir Ralph Abercromby. This was after a number of experienced senior generals had refused to serve in Ireland due to the well-known difficulties the position posed. Abercromby, who had a reputation as a credible and capable experienced

³⁴² McAnally, p. 98

³⁴³ Ibid., pp. 97-98

³⁴⁴ *Dublin Journal*, 31 December 1796 (British Library, Dublin Journal, 17 October 1782-12 December 1799)

³⁴⁵ McAnally., p. 100

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

general officer, had arrived in the kingdom in early December 1797 to commence his duties. However, he resigned in March 1798 as a result of his unpopular criticism of the state of the army in Ireland and the government policies affecting its use. Little had been done to improve the organisational faults highlighted twelve months earlier despite Carhampton's attempted reforms that included strengthening the garrisons of Cork and Limerick, along with the formation of four new battalions of light infantry created from the detached elite companies from each militia regiment.³⁴⁷ On his arrival Abercromby wrote to his friend Brigadier General John Moore that he found that the logistical requirements for the army had not been sufficiently attended to: 'On my arrival here...I found an army of upwards of 40,000 without any arrangement made for their substance (in the case of them having to take the field). No artillery were in a condition to move. Even the guns attached to the regiments were unprovided with horses. No magazines were found for the regiments and there was little or no order or discipline.'³⁴⁸ He also considered the cavalry unfit for service, with the infantry officers showing very little ability in commanding their troops.³⁴⁹

Abercromby's greatest concern was the strategic policy that had been implemented. He was alarmed at the way the regular army had been scattered into small units throughout the kingdom. Soon after his arrival he wrote to General Lake, commanding the northern district, of the necessity of concentrating the troops into large formations: 'In their present state they are exposed to be corrupted, to be disarmed and made prisoners.'³⁵⁰ The army had been dispersed to protect the gentry in disaffected areas which made it difficult to quickly assemble a sizable and effective field army to meet any possible French landing. He was of the belief that policing

³⁴⁷ Carhampton to Camden, 10 June 1797 (National Archives, HO 100/67)

³⁴⁸ Sir John Moore, *Diary*, p. 271, quoted in Pakenham, p. 61

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Abercromby to Lake, 13 December 1797 (National Archives, HO 30/66/377), quoted in Pakenham, p. 61

duties should be left to the yeomanry, that the dispersed nature of the army was ‘ruinous to the service’ and that ‘the best regiments in Europe could not long stand such usage.’³⁵¹ Abercromby argued that the gentry needed to attend to their own protection through service in the yeomanry, while the army should be used for garrison duty and to provide a substantial reserve. By ordering the withdrawal of the troops from their current deployment he hoped to restore discipline, as well as establish a number of permanent formations at strategic points.³⁵² At this time Camden fully supported his new commander-in-chief and reported to Portland that he would follow through with Abercromby’s suggestions to enable the army to regroup.³⁵³ However, although Abercromby was successful in improving the logistical requirements for the army by establishing a chain of supply depots for arms ammunition and provisions, as well as strengthening the forts guarding the along the south-west coastline, the general concentration of the army was not implemented.

Internal Irish politics determined the state of the army prior to the rebellion. On 26 February 1798 Abercromby issued a general order that was highly critical of the condition of the army: ‘The very disgraceful frequency of courts martial, and the many complaints of irregularities in the conduct of the troops in this kingdom having so unfortunately proved the army to be in a state of licentiousness which must render it formidable to everyone but the enemy.’³⁵⁴ Abercromby’s intentions were for the improvement of the military situation in Ireland; however, the wording of the order created a political backlash. The commander-in-chief immediately lost the support of a vast number of officers within the army, who took the order as direct criticism against them. The British government also saw the order as a criticism of its policies

³⁵¹ Abercromby to Pelham, 23 January 1798 (Pelham Manuscripts, British Museum, Add MSS 33/105/334, quoted in Pakenham, p. 61)

³⁵² Pakenham, p. 62

³⁵³ Camden to Portland, 24 February 1798 (National Archives, HO 100/75)

³⁵⁴ General Order, 26 February 1798 (National Archives, WO 68/221), quoted in Nelson, p. 176

in Ireland and feared the Whig opposition would use it to gain political points. However, it was pressure from the Irish parliament that led to Abercromby's resignation in late March. The Ascendancy, led by such Protestant zealots such as Lord Clare and John Beresford, believed that Abercromby had been too lenient on the disaffected population by employing less harsh measures to ensure the seizure and surrender of arms. Although his policy of threatening 'free-quarterming' of troops in the disaffected counties of Kildare and King's and Queen's had been successful in increasing the number of weapons surrendered to authorities and restoring peace, his rejection of counter-terror tactics was seen as half-measures that had created bitterness within the gentry who were the main targets of the insurgents.³⁵⁵ This led to a united move from the Irish parliament to lobby Dublin Castle for Abercromby's dismissal.³⁵⁶ Although backed by a small core of professional officers, Abercromby had lost the support of the army and parliament, forcing Camden to seek his resignation.

The change in command of the army had a direct link to the rebellion. Camden was now forced to make Lake the command-in-chief as he was the most senior general willing to accept the position. He had not been his first choice as he was not of great intellect and Camden was not in favour of the excessive actions he had promoted towards the civilian population, especially in Ulster.³⁵⁷ From the time Lake took command in April, the kingdom was set for general insurrection due to his reckless and ill-coordinated disarming policy. Counter-terror was reintroduced with vigour, especially when martial law and free-quarterming was declared in the disaffected counties. The declaration of the Insurrection Act throughout the country on 30 March saw the government actively encourage excesses against suspected

³⁵⁵ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 276

³⁵⁶ Pakenham, p. 64

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

insurgents with Pitt directing Camden to make a 'speedy and well-concerted effort for crushing the rebellion by the most vigorous military exertions in all the disturbed provinces,' and that he was not to concern himself unduly with army discipline.³⁵⁸

Although the policy proved fruitful in gaining rebel arms and the arrests of the majority of the United Irish executive, the excesses of flogging, house-burning, 'pitch-capping', murder and torture occurred on a large scale. The army was now seen as an oppressive tool of the Ascendancy that had become increasingly fearful of the Catholic peasantry, leading to large-scale confiscation and destruction of agricultural produce that people relied on for income and sustenance. The excesses committed by the military and fostered by the government only led to further alienation of sectors of the population that had previously been neutral, but who were now forced to defend themselves and their property. Such actions polarised the kingdom and led to open rebellion, although this was confined to certain parts of the country.

³⁵⁸ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 275

Chapter 5

1798: Irish Roles in the Suppression of Rebellion and Defeat of Invasion

The role of the Irish militia in the suppression of the 1798 rebellion and the defeat of the French invasion later that year has been marginalised in traditional historiography of the era. The initial defeat of the North Cork Militia at the hands of the Wexford rebels during the uprising and the rout of the British forces by the French at Castlebar have been perpetually used by British historians as examples of the poor quality of the Irish militia that necessitated the augmentation of the British forces in Ireland after 1798. However, a closer analysis of the government forces available to suppress the rebellion, together with a clear appreciation of the actions in which militia regiments were involved, provides quantitative evidence that the Irish militia was crucial in the defeat of the insurgents before the bulk of reinforcements were sent from Britain. Furthermore, there is compelling evidence to show that contrary to the traditional view, the Irish militia regiments performed well at Castlebar and that the defeat was due more to the decisions of the senior commanders present. In general, although there were serious weaknesses within the Irish establishment at the time of the uprising, the military forces proved adequate in quickly dealing with the insurrection. However, if the rebellion had spread throughout the country and had been simultaneously supported by a large French invasion force, then the ability of the government to deal with these dual threats would have seriously stretched military resources. Ultimately, the poor reputation of the militia proved politically expedient for the Ascendancy and the British government in arguing for a greater reliance on the yeomanry and the augmentation of British forces in the kingdom.

Many Ascendancy-minded and nationalist historians have tended to focus on specific events surrounding the rebellion and subsequent French invasion of 1798, while either ignoring or limiting any analysis of the cause and effect of such violent times. Ascendancy, and thus British, bias has traditionally viewed the rebellion as a Catholic uprising that was belatedly followed by an invasion by their French allies. The Irish nationalist view of the nineteenth-century promoted this, especially by exalting the leadership of the rebels by local Catholic priests. Prominent twentieth-century Irish historians, such as Thomas Bartlett, David Dickinson and Marianne Elliott have promoted alternative views surrounding the uprising and invasion by portraying the rebellion, which they argue was more a reaction to government oppression rather than the influence of French revolutionary ideology, in a broader context based on social pressures rather than a religious crusade. However, their revisionist work must be viewed as being somewhat partial towards the nationalist view that demonises the Protestant oligarchy by focussing on the numerous atrocities committed on the civilian population. Thomas Pakenham provides the most detailed narrative of the rebellion in his book *The Year of Liberty: The bloody story of the great Irish Rebellion of 1798*. While relatively more even-handed, Pakenham fails to appreciate the significant part the militia played in quelling the uprising. Moreover, his work does not provide in-depth evidence of the political machinations of the Ascendancy that were crucial to how the government dealt with the dual threats of civil insurrection and foreign invasion. By taking a more analytical approach, this chapter reveals the social, political, religious and military complexities that influenced the failed rebellion and subsequent French invasion. What is obvious is that the polarisation of the Irish population was at its zenith at this time, but that it can not simply be blamed on religious differences. A thorough understanding of what caused

these events and a more analytical view of what followed is essential to achieve a greater appreciation of why Britain was determined to take control of the kingdom.

The year 1798 was a watershed in Irish history. The rebellion that erupted in May of that year, followed by the invasion of a small French force in August, not only led to a change in the dynamics of the army in Ireland but also led to lasting political and social structures within the kingdom. The Protestant oligarchy had feared popular rebellion throughout the country for some years; however, when it occurred the government was militarily unprepared. The bulk of the fighting against the rebels and the French was conducted by the Irish militia, British fencibles and Irish yeomanry. Contrary to the historiography surrounding these events, the inexperienced and semi-trained Irish militia generally proved their loyalty and fought well, leading to the eventual defeat of their foes. However, the government victories during the year also came about due to the lack of organization and leadership within the rebel armies, as well as the limited size of the French invasion force. The Royal Navy also played a major role in the defence of the kingdom by intercepting and defeating a series of French fleets carrying troops intended for Ireland. Ultimately, the rampant militant republicanism and militant loyalism that had polarized the Irish population and had reached crisis point that year, led to atrocities typical of civil wars and the estimated death of 25,000 rebels and non-combatants, along with hundreds of soldiers.³⁵⁹ However, although the rebellion was a Continental-scale uprising and an extremely 'bloody' affair, it was successfully dealt with quickly, leading to Britain imposing greater control over the troubled land.

Clearly, in early 1798 the British and Irish governments had failed to make sufficient military preparations for the simultaneous insurrection and French invasion

³⁵⁹ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 287

that had been the long term goal of the United Irish. In May of that year the Irish establishment was of insufficient strength to cope with a widespread popular uprising and an invasion. According to the official return of the government forces in Ireland submitted in January of that year, there were a total of 41,068 rank and file troops serving in the kingdom at that time.³⁶⁰ This included 3,493 regular line cavalry, 1,816 fencible cavalry, 1,830 regular line infantry, 10,751 fencible infantry, and 22,728 Irish militia.³⁶¹ There was no further return made until July of the same year, which was after the rebellion had been smothered and the garrison, boosted by reinforcements from Britain, had been increased to 48,332.³⁶² It is probable that when the rebellion erupted in May the number of troops in the kingdom would have been similar to numbers given in the January return. Although General Sir Ralph Abercromby had improved the concentration of some regiments in an effort to provide reserves and improve training, the majority of troops were now mainly dispersed to defend against a French invasion, ensuring that regiments were either posted to garrison strategic cities, towns and coastal forts, such as Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Limerick, or stationed at one of the permanent camps to provide reserves.³⁶³ Those individual units that were scattered throughout rural Ireland were commonly dispersed into small troops or companies to protect the local gentry and to assist in the search and seizure of arms. An example of this was the North Cork Militia which was the only regiment stationed in the county of Wexford on the eve of the uprising. This battalion had been divided into platoons and companies that were stationed in Wexford town and several smaller provincial towns, such as Enniscorthy and Ferns, not only to assist in counter-insurgent operations but also to assist local magistrates and yeomanry in maintaining

³⁶⁰ Ferguson, p. 147

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Gahan, p. 111

the law.³⁶⁴ This ensured that when the rebellion broke out in Wexford, there were less than 500 troops between the Wicklow/Wexford border and Duncannon Fort near Waterford.³⁶⁵ Few troops had been stationed in County Wexford as rebellion was unexpected there due to the prosperity within the county and the lack of known United Irish activity there.

The initial defeat of the North Cork Militia was due to the military force in Wexford being inadequate and totally unprepared for the popular uprising in the county. The government had not expected any trouble in the south-east of Ireland, either from the United Irish or their French allies. This is evident by analysing the concentration of the Irish garrison at the time. In May 1798 half of the Irish establishment was stationed in Munster and concentrated along a short defensive line from Limerick to Cork due to the belief that any French attack would most likely occur in the south.³⁶⁶ The rest of the Irish army was clustered in the midlands to protect Dublin, while there was a sizable force maintained in Ulster where the United Irish were perceived to be strongest. The North Cork Militia had only recently been sent to Wexford, either in late April or early May, to assist in the search and seizure of arms. According to Sir Richard Musgrave, the battalion headquarters was established in the town of Wexford, where around nineteen officers and 369 rank and file were stationed.³⁶⁷ Only three companies were distributed elsewhere in the county, with Captain Snow's company and 30 men from Captain de Courcy's company posted at Enniscorthy, one subaltern and 30 men stationed at Gorey, as well as the same number billeted at Ferns.³⁶⁸ The only other armed forces immediately available in the county to assist the militia were the yeomanry. The nearest available reinforcements

³⁶⁴ Nelson, pp. 186-188

³⁶⁵ Gahan, p. 111

³⁶⁶ Chart, pp. 497-516

³⁶⁷ Myers & McKnight, p. 306

³⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 326, 370 & 409

were scattered in neighbouring counties, with the Antrim Militia at Arklow, County Wicklow, the Meath Militia and 86 soldiers of the 13th Foot in Waterford City, along with the 9th Dragoons stationed in Carlow.³⁶⁹ The distance these units had to march to support the North Corks, coupled with uncertainty and the necessity to maintain the peace and security of the areas in which they were garrisoned ensured that sole militia regiment in Wexford was initially forced to confront the numerically superior rebel forces on its own.

The Irish militia deserves more credit for the suppression of the rebellion and the recapture of Wexford than the traditional historiography has acknowledged. By analysing the composition of the government forces in the principal actions against the rebels, it becomes obvious that the militia provided the major element of the infantry. In most modern accounts of the battles the involvement of the militia has either largely ignored or criticised. However, militia regiments provided the bulk of the government forces in all of the crucial actions that led to the containment and defeat of the rebels: including Newtownbarry with 61 percent; New Ross with 100 percent; Arklow with 64 percent; and Vinegar Hill with 65 percent.³⁷⁰ These battles were crucial in the defeat of the insurrection: at Newtownbarry the insurgents were prevented from advancing into County Carlow; at New Ross they were stopped from moving into counties Kilkenny and Waterford; and at Arklow the rebels were prevented from advancing on Dublin. Defeat in these actions greatly demoralised the United Irish forces and forced them to concentrate at Vinegar Hill where they were totally destroyed on 21 June. Even in Ulster, where there were only a few militia regiments in 1798, the militia provided one-third of the government infantry at the principal battle of Ballynahinch which saw the defeat of the rebels and the end of the

³⁶⁹ Chart, p. 508

³⁷⁰ Nelson, p. 214

uprising in the province.³⁷¹ The serious reverses at Oulart Hill and Tubberneering, where the militia provided 100 percent of the infantry force, most certainly added to the unfavourable reputation of the militia. However, these defeats were not due to the poor quality of the troops, but more to the inexperience and over-confidence of the commanding officers. At Oulart Hill a single company of the North Cork militia was ordered to charge up hill in a position where their left flank was exposed to a flank attack, while at Tubberneering a column of militia led by an inexperienced regular officer, Colonel Walpole, was ambushed in a defile due to Walpole failing to deploy scouts.³⁷² What is evident is that these actions which resulted in the defeat of the rebellion within five weeks, all took place before any significant reinforcements could be sent from Britain.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Proportion of Militia in infantry engaged</i>
24 May 1798	Naas	100 percent
	Kilcullen	None
	Prosperous (defeat)	100 percent
25 May 1798	Carlow	60 percent (estimate)
27 May 1798	Oulart Hill (defeat)	100 percent
28 May 1798	Enniscorthy	27 percent
1 June 1798	Newtownbarry	61 percent
4 June 1798	Tubberneering (defeat)	100 percent (estimate)
5 June 1798	New Ross	100 percent
7 June 1798	Antrim	100 percent
9 June 1798	Arklow	64 percent
12 June 1798	Ballynahinch	33 percent (estimate)
21 June 1798	Vinegar Hill	65 percent (estimate)
26 June 1798	Kilconnell Hill	100 percent
5 July 1798	Whiteheaps	100 percent (estimate)

Table 5.1 – Irish militia involvement in the 1798 rebellion

(Source: Nelson, *The Irish Militia, 1793-1802*, p. 214)

Although the French invasion of August that year came too late to support the United Irish and proved nothing more than an ill-advised ‘forlorn hope’, the defeat of

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Pakenham, pp. 207-208

the government forces at Castlebar led to the permanent tainting of the reputation of the Irish militia and thus, ultimately determined the future composition of the Irish military establishment. The Longford and Kilkenny militias were made the scapegoats for an ignominious rout known as the 'Castlebar Races' which occurred on 27 August when the French advanced on the town, that proved a major embarrassment for the British army. The traditional historiography surrounding the battle places the blame for the sudden government retreat on the Longford Militia who were placed at the rear of the government defence line. Criticism of the militia came from both General Hutchinson and Lieutenant General Lake, who were the senior officers present and although disagreeing over who was in command, concurred that the whole force broke due to the militiamen suddenly falling back from their position.³⁷³ However, both Hutchinson and Lake were attempting to deflect blame from their own part in the debacle. In a letter to Cornwallis after the battle, Lake attempted to avoid any responsibility by blaming the militia: 'I think that it is absolutely necessary to state for your Lordship's information that it is impossible to manage the militia; their whole conduct has been this day most shameful, and I am sorry to say that there is a strong appearance of disaffection...I have thought it necessary to march to this place in hope that the soldiers will get the better of their panic, which is beyond description.'³⁷⁴ In a letter of resignation sent by Hutchinson to Cornwallis at the end of September he claimed that the two militia regiments under his command had been 'previously tampered with' by the United Irish and that their known disaffection had induced the French to attack.³⁷⁵ He further laid blame on the militia stating that they had run off after having fired volleys on the French without orders and before the French were in

³⁷³ Ross, p. 388-389

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 408-411

musket range.³⁷⁶ Such comments were conveniently used by the military establishment to cover up mistakes made by the senior commanders and cemented the lasting poor reputation of the Irish militia.

Contrary to the historiography promoted by nineteenth century Ascendancy historians such as Sir Richard Musgrave, the Irish militia proved an effective and loyal force during the turbulent year of 1798. To be sure, the militiamen were prone to bouts of ill-discipline, especially when let loose on the defeated rebels, but in general the militia regiments proved their worth in battle when well led. The prime example was at the battle of New Ross where the entire government infantry consisted of militia. The personal courage and determination of General Johnson inspired the soldiers to tenaciously defend the town against overwhelming numbers and they proved steadfast in their determination to defeat the rebels through repeated counter-attacks. Likewise at Arklow, the militia accounted for the majority of the government troops that stoutly defended the town with disciplined musketry, which coupled with the artillery, ensured the eventual rout of the United Irish army that was attempting to march on the capital. Again, in Kildare and Meath the militia provided the bulk of the forces used to surround and defeat the insurgents before the rebellion could spread further. In Ulster, the Monaghan Militia, whose loyalty was under question due to the high number of Catholic rank and file, as well as the recent executions of a small number of disaffected militiamen, proved to be most reliable at Ballynahinch where their discipline and doggedness saw them rout the rebels who had mounted a surprise attack with superior numbers.³⁷⁷ These events all proved to be decisive in the defeat of the rebellion before reinforcements could be mobilised and sent from Britain. The criticism aimed at the militia during the uprising appears to be in regard to the

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Nelson, pp. 206-207

behaviour towards civilians and property after battles had been won. However, it is easy to understand how any such conduct occurred when it had been actively encouraged in previous operations led by Carhampton and Lake.

It is clear that in general the quality in leadership determined the behaviour of the militia and that the officer corps must be held responsible for any valid criticism against their troops. The most obvious example was at Castlebar where the disaster was conveniently blamed on the ill-discipline of the militia. Ivan Nelson convincingly argues that there was a measure of political expediency in attributing the defeat to the poor quality of the militia and disaffection in the regiments, since this proved to contemporaries that the defence of Ireland was best handled by the British government in London.³⁷⁸ And although Cornwallis was a prime supporter of such national defence policy, it was plain to him where the real blame should lie. In a reply to Hutchinson's letter of resignation, the commander-in-chief stated that he believed the general had made a rash 'error in judgement' in moving forward too early without orders. He further stated that it was not prudent or advisable to place inexperienced troops in a situation of being attacked by seasoned regular forces or to have to make a 'precipitate' retreat.³⁷⁹ However, Cornwallis did not accept the general's resignation and only added to the false reputation of the native troops through his official correspondence where he claimed he could not release any regular troops from Ireland for the campaign in Egypt due to him being burdened 'with a militia on which no dependence whatever can be placed.'³⁸⁰ His opinion of the militia was obviously influenced by the reports of his subordinates and the views of the Ascendancy from what he stated in a letter to Major General Ross in September 1798: 'the Irish militia, from their repeated misbehaviour in the field, and their extreme licentiousness, are

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p 217

³⁷⁹ Ross, pp. 411-412

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

fallen into such universal contempt and abhorrence, that when applications are made for the protection of troops, it is often requested that Irish militia may not be sent.³⁸¹

In truth, Hutchinson was responsible for the defeat and not the militia. He had made a number of fundamental errors, with the greatest being the ordering of his troops to retreat at a time when they were holding favourable defensive ground. The first line, which included the Kilkenny Militia, had just successfully routed the Irish levies under French command and the commanding officers refused to retire when the order came. However, the whole line began to retreat toward the town when Hutchinson sent a second order to retire, stating that failure to do so would lead to punishment for disobedience.³⁸² The order proved disastrous in that not only did the French then seize the favourable ground, but the confusion and disorder in the government army led to a rout. The first unit to break was a regular cavalry regiment, the 6th Dragoon Guards, which rode through the Longford Militia who were being held in reserve. The disorderly retreat continued through Castlebar where the Longford Militia made a determined stand against experienced French grenadiers at the bridge in an effort to allow the government forces to escape.³⁸³ The defenders eventually surrendered only when the French had cut off their line of retreat. The courageous actions of the militia were tainted by 53 members of the Longford regiment joining the French forces once captured, although this was obviously just an attempt to escape captivity for most of them as the majority had deserted before they reached Ballinamuck.³⁸⁴ This was obviously accepted by some military authorities

³⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 414-415

³⁸² Nelson, p. 221-222

³⁸³ Richard Francis Hayes, 'An Officers Account of the French Campaign in Ireland in 1798,' *The Irish Sword*, vol. 2, issue 6-7 (1955), pp. 161-171

³⁸⁴ Richard Francis Hayes, 'The Battle of Castlebar,' *The Irish Sword*, vol. 3, issue 11 (1957), pp. 107-114

who showed clemency to one of the alleged deserters when he stated that he had stood his ground at Castlebar and that it was the army that had deserted him.³⁸⁵

The year 1798 marked a turning point in the fortunes of the Irish militia, which from this time had lost the confidence which the British government had previously placed in it to defend Ireland. A better understanding of the rebellion and the events immediately leading up to it provides an insight as to how this occurred. The increasingly violent counter-insurgent operations being carried out by government forces, which included the bulk of the militia, created tension within the disaffected counties and had an impact on the military capabilities of United Irish. The continual arm seizures and arrests of senior rebel leaders had reduced the effectiveness of the organisation. Months of fruitless waiting for French action had a corrosive effect on rural supporters who had been the subjects of military oppression during April and May. This had damaged revolutionary morale and heightened religious tensions.³⁸⁶ Arthur O'Connor and Father Quigley were the first of the United Irish executive to be captured when they were arrested in Margate, Kent, on 28 February 1798 after being sent to negotiate with the French Directory for military support in the proposed insurrection.³⁸⁷ This was followed by the mass arrest of sixteen of the most senior United Irish executives, including the Leinster leadership, at Oliver Bond's Dublin address on 12 March. Such disasters urged those of the executive still at large, such as Lord Edward Fitzgerald, John Lawless and John Sheares, to attempt a *coup* before the government had succeeded in destroying the rebel infrastructure.³⁸⁸ The luke-warm response of their allies led to the new United

³⁸⁵ Nelson, p. 230

³⁸⁶ David Dickson, *New Foundations: Ireland 1660-1800*, 2nd ed. (Dublin, 2000), p. 211

³⁸⁷ Curtin, p. 64

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258

Irish leadership determining to raise a rebellion on their own in the hope that it would prompt the French to send an invasion force once the revolt had begun.³⁸⁹

The fundamental purpose of the United Irish rebellion in 1798 was the overthrow of the Irish administration in Dublin. The primary military objective was the capture of the capital. This was dependent on participation of rebels over a wide area. The success of the United Irish uprising was reliant on a three-stage strategy. Central to this plan was the capture of key sites in Dublin, such as the Customs House and Four Courts, in the belief that depriving the government of such buildings would cripple the established infrastructure of the kingdom.³⁹⁰ The second priority was to secure the regions immediately outside the capital to establish a defensive ring around the city. A letter from an informer, Francis Higgins, sent to Edward Cooke on 20 May indicated that the insurgents had intended to occupy positions from Garretstown, Naul, Dunboyne, taking a circuitous route around the city to Dunleary.³⁹¹ The third phase of the operation revolved around establishing sufficient forces to defend against the inevitable counter-attack from the government army.³⁹² It was determined that the uprising would begin on 24 May, to be signalled by the stopping of the overnight mail coaches on the outskirts of Dublin on the evening of 23 May. It was hoped that such tactics would spread panic to the garrison towns and help paralyse the government.³⁹³ The executive believed that victory would be obtained through superior numbers provided by the thousands of Catholic Defenders and the support of disaffected members of the militia.³⁹⁴

³⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 11-12

³⁹⁰ Francis Higgins to Edward Cooke, 20 May 1798 (National Archives, Ireland – Rebellion Papers 620/18/14), quoted in Liam Chambers, 'The 1798 Rebellion in North Leinster,' in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, eds. Thomas Bartlett, et. al. (Dublin, 2003), pp. 122-123

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Pakenham, pp. 123-124

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

The success of the uprising was jeopardised before it began through the loss of its operational leader. The arrest and fatal wounding of Lord Edward Fitzgerald in Dublin on 19 May was a disastrous blow for the United Irish cause. Higgins had informed Dublin Castle that this revolutionary Irish peer was to be the commander-in-chief of the rebel forces, due to his high profile and that he was the only executive member to have had any military experience.³⁹⁵ His capture ensured that there was a lack of coordination and leadership which prevented an effective rising in Dublin. Fitzgerald's name had given credibility to the planned revolt, and his arrest had persuaded many in the capital that the cause was already lost.³⁹⁶ Not only did the United Irish now lack any central leadership, but thanks to informers such as Higgins and planted spies within the insurgent organisation, such as Francis Magan and Captain John Armstrong, the government was fully aware of the intended plans of the rebels. Troops, which mainly consisted of militia regiments together with several regiments of fencibles and regular cavalry, were wisely concentrated in and around Dublin where measures were taken to discourage insurgent attacks on government buildings within the capital by increasing armed patrols and strengthening guards at strategic points, such as Dublin Castle.³⁹⁷ Camden ensured that the streets of the city were saturated with troops who were employed in arresting suspects and searching for arms, with the summary burning of all buildings where pikes were found.³⁹⁸ And although Pakenham claims that confusion reigned amongst the Dublin garrison when the alarm was called and that there had been insufficient steps taken to secure vital bridges, the show of force was enough to persuade the estimated few hundred

³⁹⁵ Francis Higgins to Edward Cooke, 20 May 1798 (National Archives, Ireland – Rebellion Papers 620/18/14), quoted in Liam Chambers, 'The 1798 Rebellion in North Leinster,' in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, eds. Thomas Bartlett, et. al. (Dublin, 2003), pp. 122-123

³⁹⁶ Curtin, p. 258

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Pakenham, pp. 112-113

leaderless rebels within the city on 23 May not to take any action.³⁹⁹ Such activities discouraged a general uprising in the city, which was necessary for the United Irishmen to achieve their first objective. The seizing of Dublin was imperative for the success of the rebel strategy and the failure to do so ensured the revolt was no longer a *coup d'état*, but a series of uncoordinated local actions that lacked direction.

The rising in the surrounding counties of Dublin met with some success due to the rebels having the initiative. Although the government had been aware that the mail coaches were to be targets of the insurgents, officials believed the rising had been planned for a later date and it was a shock to them when they received a letter from an informer on the afternoon of 23 May stating that the revolt was to begin that evening.⁴⁰⁰ Couriers were immediately dispatched to Lord Gosford commanding at Naas and General Wilford at Kildare, however, the numerous smaller detachment scattered in towns and villages in the surrounding Dublin could not be informed in sufficient time to prevent them being surprised by the United Irishmen.⁴⁰¹

Subsequently, that night cells of United Irishmen in counties Dublin, Meath, Kildare, Kings', Queen's and Wicklow gathered along the main roads leading from Dublin on which the various mail coaches travelled. Road blocks were established not only to seize the coaches but also to sever communications between the high command at Dublin Castle and the government forces in the provinces. The rebels were able to quickly gather together substantial forces that ensured superior numbers when launching surprise attacks on small garrisons of government troops. Near Naul 2,000 rebels surrounded the Westpaltown barracks, while at Curragh around 1,000 insurgents marched down the village street armed with pikes and muskets.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 119

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 115-117

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 129

⁴⁰² Ibid., pp. 123-124

Roadblocks were formed along the Navan road, the Galway road, as well as the main road leading south to Cork, and it is estimated that by the morning of 24 May up to 10,000 rebels had formed a secure crescent around the capital.⁴⁰³

It was the isolated garrisons of militia and yeomanry that were the first targets of the rebels. The excessive counter-insurgent operations that had been directed by the government and carried out with much vigour by the army and yeomanry, had resulted in a number of atrocities that alienated the local populations. One of the most famous examples was that of Captain John Swayne who commanded a detachment of the City of Cork Militia in the town of Prosperous, County Kildare and who was notoriously known for advocating the torturous practice of ‘pitch capping’ suspects. On the night of 23 May when the rebellion began, Swayne was murdered in his bed and his troops were surprised and locked in their barracks, where they all perished after it was set alight.⁴⁰⁴ The policy of free-quartering also proved disastrous for some troops who were separated from their officers when the revolt erupted. In Clane, County Kildare, soldiers from the Armagh Militia were still in their billets when the rebels attacked the village. They had to desperately fight their way to their officer in small groups, losing two killed and five wounded, before they could form an effective defence.⁴⁰⁵ On the same night a detachment of Tyrone Militia stationed at Ballymore Eustace, County Wicklow, fought off a determined rebel attack but lost an officer and four men in doing so.⁴⁰⁶ The insurgents proved successful in capturing a number of small towns, forcing the surprised garrisons to flee, while any army officers, such as

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Nelson, pp. 183-184

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

Lieutenant William Giffard of the 82nd Foot, who had the misfortune of travelling by coach and being stopped by the rebels, were usually murdered.⁴⁰⁷

The insurgents gained some initial success against the government forces through the element of surprise and superior numbers. At Prosperous the rebel force comprised of 500 men who were mainly farmers and cotton mill workers led by Dr. John Esmonde, an officer in the local yeomanry.⁴⁰⁸ This mob marched to the town barracks and forced their way into the guard house where the twelve militiamen present were all dispatched. A detachment of the Ancient Britons stationed at the cotton factory was subsequently attacked and overwhelmed. Of the 57 soldiers who had formed the garrison, only nineteen managed to escape with their lives.⁴⁰⁹ Ironically, most of those killed were Catholic. Synchronized attacks had also been launched at the nearby towns of Clane and Naas where the surprised government troops had managed to beat off the first attacks, but with some losses. However, the small combined garrison of local yeomanry and Armagh Militia at Clane was forced to retreat to Naas due to the large number of rebels who threatened to surround them. At Naas the garrison of around 220 men was attacked by three separate columns of rebels, amounting to several thousand, who were intent on capturing the town barracks and gaol. Only after repeated charges by the mounted Ancient Britons, but mainly through the telling fire of the militia artillery, were the insurgents forced to retreat.⁴¹⁰ At the village of Old Kilcullen, Kildare, the aged Lieutenant General Sir Ralph Dundas, commander of the midland district, was unable to organise a counter-attack as he himself was beleaguered by 300 rebels who had occupied the local churchyard. With only a mixed force of 20 fencible infantry and 40 cavalry of the

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ R. Griffith to Pelham, 13 July 1798 (British Museum, Add MSS 33,106/10), quoted in Pakenham, pp. 134-136

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Pakenham, pp. 134-136

Romney Fencibles and 9th Dragoons, Dundas ordered the mounted element of his force to repeatedly charge the fortified rebels. This was disastrous for the government force, in that the cavalry proved ineffective against the insurgent pikemen, resulting in the heavy loss of 23 soldiers killed.⁴¹¹ Dundas was then forced to fight his way out of the village in an attempt to concentrate the dispersed troops in the county. The rebel cause was further helped by an order for the government troops in County Kildare to initially withdraw and concentrate at Kildare town in an effort to create a sufficient counter-attack force. This enabled the United Irish to establish a small enclave that was successful in severing communications to the south and west of the capital in a time of confusion and uncertainty.

However, the United Irish success in most of Leinster was limited and short-lived. There had been fourteen engagements in the first 24-hours of the rebellion, of which only two had been victories for the insurgents. In most cases small government garrisons had been able to repel rebel attacks and in some cases rout the ill-disciplined mobs. The rebels had managed to occupy a number of towns and villages, but mainly through them not being garrisoned or through the government troops being strategically withdrawn. Those villages that had been seized were soon recaptured, such as Rathangan, County Kildare, which had been secured by the insurgents on 23 May but subsequently recaptured by the City of Cork Militia the following day.⁴¹² The abortive rebel attacks on Lucan, County Dublin, Kilcock, County Meath, and Leixlip, County Kildare on 25 May led to insurgents withdrawing to a defensive camp at Dunboyne. Lack of leadership then led to indecision, resulting in the rebel army being attacked and routed at the battle of Tara in Meath two days later. The uprising in the counties of the Pale was effectively over with the surrender of 3,000 rebels at

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Lieutenant Colonel Longford to Lieutenant General Dundas, 29 May 1798 (National Archives, Ireland, Rebellion Papers 620/37/208), quoted in Nelson, p. 184

Knockallan Hill, Kildare on 28 May, with only a number of small bands of ineffectual United Irish remaining scattered throughout the countryside. Thomas Pakenham convincingly argues that those locations that the United Irish had occupied were of no strategic value and that no military threat to the capital ever materialised.⁴¹³ However, news of this localised rebellion had quickly spread throughout the kingdom and had inspired thousands of other disaffected Irishmen in Wexford to take up arms against the state.

It was the rebellion in Wexford that posed the most serious threat to the Ascendancy in Ireland. This was the only county where the United Irish were able to raise a number of armed civilian mobs that was large enough to overwhelm the limited government forces in south Leinster. The exact number of disaffected who joined the uprising in Wexford will never be known as the rebel columns consisted of clusters of localised forces of volunteers or impressed civilians that were never formed into formal regiments. An army in name only, these assemblies had no structure and were mostly led by individuals who had no military experience, relying on the fervour of the crowd to obtain success. Pikes, which were made locally and readily available, were the most common weapons of the rebels and proved effective against yeoman cavalry, while agricultural implements were also weapons of necessity due to the scarcity of firearms.⁴¹⁴ The number of rebel ‘volunteers’ remaining in the field was fluid and determined by the successes or defeats of the insurgents. Nevertheless, some indication of the size of the rebel forces can be established from contemporary accounts of the rebellion. The first encounter between government troops and United Irishmen in Wexford occurred at Oulart Hill on 27

⁴¹³ Pakenham, p. 137

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 136

May, where Cornwallis claims the rebel force consisted of 5,000 men.⁴¹⁵ Ivan Nelson in his recent book, *The Irish Militia, 1793-1802: Ireland's Forgotten Army*, claims that there were approximately 6,000 rebels involved in the attack on Enniscorthy on 28 May 1798, although he fails to reveal his source.⁴¹⁶ The figures given for the rebel army that attacked New Ross on 5 June were greater. The figure of 30,000 quoted by the Protestant zealot, Sir Richard Musgrave, can be disregarded as a gross exaggeration due to his obvious bias in his attempt to magnify the Catholic threat.⁴¹⁷ However, the numbers of 10-15,000 given by Miles Byrne, a United Irish officer who fought in the uprising, seem more likely, indicating that the rebel army was 10-15 times the size of the defending government force.⁴¹⁸ He claims that the insurgent force that attacked Arklow on 9 June consisted of 20,000 rebels, but that their defeat was due to only 2,000 men having muskets for which there was very little ammunition.⁴¹⁹ What these figures indicate is that the United Irish were able to muster a horde of 30-40,000 men in a very short time. It was imperative for Dublin Castle that the rebellion be contained before it could spread throughout the kingdom.

Contrary to the historiography of a Catholic crusade promoted by contemporary historians such as Musgrave, the rising in Wexford gained popular support due to localised economic depression. This had caused some disaffection amongst the middle-classes, as well as the Catholic peasantry, ensuring the membership of prominent Protestant and Catholic gentry, such as Bagenal Harvey, who provided leadership amongst the United Irish in the county.⁴²⁰ Intelligence

⁴¹⁵ Ross, p. 345

⁴¹⁶ Nelson, p. 188

⁴¹⁷ Myers & McKnight, p. 331

⁴¹⁸ Thomas Bartlett, 'Miles Byrne: United Irishman, Irish Exile and Beau Sabreur,' *The Mighty Wave: The 1798 Rebellion in Wexford*, eds. Daire Keogh & Nicholas Furlong (Dublin, 1996), p. 121

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122

⁴²⁰ T.W. Moody & W.E. Vaughan, *A New History of Ireland: Vol. 4- Eighteenth Century Ireland, 1691-1800* (Oxford, 1986), p. 357

gained from government spies, informers and from the arrest of United Irish leaders, such as Anthony Perry of Inch, had led to an increase in counter-terror activities in northern Wexford.⁴²¹ These increasingly violent activities of search, seizure and arrests, coupled with propaganda sponsored by the rebel leadership and local magistrates, had polarised the community. Protestants were fearful of Catholic insurrection, while the Catholic peasantry was continually being exposed to floggings, house-burnings and 'pitch-capping' by the yeomanry.⁴²² A wave of hysteria swept through the county, with stories of atrocities committed by the yeomanry encouraging those who had previously sworn allegiance to the crown to take up arms against the local government agents. On 26 May news of the murder of rebel prisoners by the garrison at Dunlavin, Kildare, along with the same plight of 28 prisoners at Carnew on the Wicklow border, convinced many that the rumours of the planned extermination of the Catholic population had begun.⁴²³ At this same time news of the rebellion in Kildare and Meath had spread throughout Wexford. Ultimately, it was the fear of torture, death and destruction of property, together with the stories of rebel successes that convinced thousands to join the armed resistance.⁴²⁴

The character of the rebellion was more of a peasant *jacquerie* than of a revolution. With the arrests of the senior leaders within the Leinster United Irish movement, the subsequent rebellion became a spontaneous and disorganised revolt. The rebels lacked any central direction once they rose against the local garrisons, with any further action being determined by local leaders who were not privy to any grand strategy proposed by the imprisoned rebel executive. This ensured that many rebels only rose after hearing of similar actions occurring elsewhere, while others quickly

⁴²¹ Pakenham, pp. 164-167

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Hewitt, p. 69

surrendered once it became clear the rebellion would fail.⁴²⁵ The support that the uprising did gain was fuelled more by resentment than politics. In Wexford the rebel leadership was comprised of disaffected Protestant and Catholic landed-gentry who were suffering from an economic downturn due to poor grain prices and resented the indifference of the government towards their plight. The peasantry gave their support due to resentment of the oppressive nature of the government counter-insurgent operations rather than from any desire for shared political power, with leadership provided at parish level by local Catholic priests, such as Fathers John and Michael Murphy and Philip Roche.⁴²⁶ Thomas Cloney, a young Wexford farmer who joined the rebels at Vinegar Hill only took up the cause as he felt he had no alternative due to coercion from the insurgents and tactics of the government: 'The innocent and the guilty were alike driven into acts of unwilling hostility to the existing government; but there was no alternative; every preceding day saw the instruments of torture filling the yawning sepulchres with the victims of suspicion or malice; as a partial resistance could never tend to mitigate the cruelty of their tormentors, I saw no second course for me, or indeed for any Catholic in my part of the country, to pursue.'⁴²⁷

By holding the initiative, the United Irish were able to initially defeat the inadequate government forces in Wexford and take control of the county. The rebellion erupted in Wexford on the evening of 26 May when a party of insurgents led by a local parish priest, Father John Murphy, intercepted a patrol of the Camolin yeomanry near the village of the Harrow, near Ferns. An attempt to disarm the mob by Lieutenant Bookey, the officer-in-command of the patrol, led to him and another member of the local gentry attached to the corps being killed.⁴²⁸ This incident ignited

⁴²⁵ Pakenham, p. 217

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Hewitt, p. 69

⁴²⁸ Pakenham, pp. 164-167

rebellion in the county, with the yeomanry seeking revenge by indiscriminately killing suspects and burning houses in the area, while thousands of the peasantry joined the insurgents in attacking isolated yeoman garrisons and the homes of Protestant magistrates, who were seen as agents of the government, and gentry in an effort to gain firearms. With the yeomanry mainly based in various towns, the United Irish were able to effectively mobilise in the countryside unhindered.⁴²⁹ News of a large force of insurgents having gathered at Oulart Hill, fifteen miles north of Wexford town prompted Colonel Foote of the North Cork Militia to march against them on 27 May. A force of 109 militiamen and nineteen mounted yeomen met the estimated 500 rebels who had strategically placed themselves at the top of the hill.⁴³⁰ According to Thomas Pakenham, Major Lombard of the militia instigated an uphill charge on the rebel position without the permission of Foote, who had wisely determined not to attack due to the superior numbers of the insurgents and the likelihood of being outflanked.⁴³¹ As a result, after firing their muskets, the inexperienced and outnumbered government force was outflanked and annihilated, with only Foote and three soldiers managing to escape with their lives.⁴³² Victory in this skirmish was crucial to the rebel cause in that it not only gave the insurgents confidence in facing government troops, but led to thousands more joining the revolt. It was the rapid rise of the disaffected populace, coupled with the shock of defeat that dramatically reduced the morale of the government forces in the county. The superior number of rebels eventually forced the inadequate and isolated militia and yeomanry garrisons to retreat from Ferns, Gorey and Enniscorthy where they had concentrated. On 28 May Father Murphy led 6,000 rebels in an attack on the 300-man garrison at Enniscorthy,

⁴²⁹ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 149

⁴³⁰ Pakenham, p. 175

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Nelson, p. 187

which included 80 North Cork militiamen and over 200 yeomen from three local corps.⁴³³ And although the garrison was able to successfully withdraw from the town, it was at the cost of 74 men killed and 17 wounded.⁴³⁴ The loss of so many of their comrades at Oulart Hill and Enniscorthy had caused a collapse in morale of the North Cork Militia, and it was the regiment's perceived unreliability and reduction to only 273 rank and file that led to its evacuation of Wexford town on 30 May.⁴³⁵ Once the town was abandoned by the militia, the United Irish occupied it and proclaimed the creation of the Republic of Wexford. In effect, mass support for the rebellion ensured that the United Irish quickly gained control of the whole county, with the government forces now having to prevent the rebellion from spreading.

Confusion and lack of experience within the officer corps of the local government forces initially aided the rebel cause. With the majority of the county under rebel control, Wexford town was besieged. At this time the garrison was approximately 1,000 strong which included the remnants of the North Cork Militia, various yeomanry corps, as well as 200 soldiers of the Donegal regiment that had marched to the town from their post at Duncannon Fort. The officer now commanding in the town was Lieutenant Colonel Maxwell of the Donegal Militia who had called for more reinforcements. A force comprising the Meath Militia, a severely under strength battalion of the 13th Foot and several pieces of artillery, had reached Taghmon about twelve miles west of Wexford town on 30 May. However, confusion and inexperience led to the advance guard of the column, including the artillery, being ambushed and annihilated at Three Rocks. The commander of the main column, General Fawcett laid the blame on Captain Adams, a company officer of the Meath Militia: 'Owing to extreme ignorance, and a total inexperience of any service or his

⁴³³ Pakenham, p. 178

⁴³⁴ Nelson, pp. 188-189

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p. 187

duty as an officer, instead of waiting to receive any orders from me, proceeded. Adams, with no precaution taken, or weapons loaded, was ambushed and cut to pieces.’⁴³⁶ This proved disastrous for the relief of Wexford in that Fawcett then chose to retreat due to the overwhelming number of rebels, further reducing the morale of the besieged garrison. A similar incident occurred at Tubberneering, near Ballymore, on 4 June where a column of militia, commanded by the inexperienced Colonel Walpole and sent from Dublin to reinforce General Loftus in his advance from Arklow into Wexford, was ambushed and routed. Walpole had been a staff officer more concerned with fame and glory, who had not only disregarded superior orders by taking an alternative route, but had also failed to place advance guards and flankers on the march.⁴³⁷ This event proved crucial in that it caused panic amongst the government force commanded by General Loftus that had gathered at Gorey for an advance into the rebel held county. Confusion then led to the whole force abandoning Gorey to the insurgents and a general retreat of government troops through Arklow to Wicklow.⁴³⁸ These incidents allowed time for the United Irish to form their rapidly increasing army of disaffected civilians into three sizable columns, with the intention of marching into neighbouring counties to spread revolution. The suffering of such reverses also provided the Ascendancy with evidence to support their questioning of the competence of the militia.

However, once Dublin Castle had recovered from the initial shock of the uprising, the military hierarchy in Ireland effectively contained and extinguished the rebellion. The government reaction to the revolt revolved around three priorities: firstly, the protection of Dublin, then the defeat of the rebels in Kildare and Meath,

⁴³⁶ Major General Fawcett to Lieutenant General Lake (Public Records Office, Northern Ireland, MIC 67/43: Lake-Hewitt Correspondence), quoted in Nelson, p. 190

⁴³⁷ Myers & McKnight, p. 373

⁴³⁸ Nelson, p. 195

and finally the recapture of Wexford.⁴³⁹ Dublin had remained secure from the outset of the uprising and by 1 June the army had regained the initiative in the counties surrounding Wexford. By 28 May many of the rebels in Kildare had seen the futility of further resistance with 3,000 surrendering to General Dundas at Knockallan Hill, while General Duff had relieved the beleaguered garrison in Kildare town on the same day. On 1 June the crown forces prevented the rebellion from spreading into Carlow by defeating a large insurgent army that had launched an attack on the garrison at Newtownbarry. However, the most significant encounter occurred at New Ross, County Kilkenny, on 5 June, where a rebel force led by a prominent Protestant magistrate of Wexford, Bagenal Harvey, was decisively beaten in a hard fought battle that was characterised by brutal and determined street fighting. The determination of the 1,400 man garrison of militia, yeomanry and 5th Dragoons was not enough to prevent the insurgents, whose force was estimated to be ten times that of the defenders, from entering the town. However, the placement of artillery in strategic spots led to shocking carnage that had reduced the rebel army to only 2-3,000 effectives by the end of the day.⁴⁴⁰ What makes this battle so significant is that it not only prevented the rebellion from spreading into Kilkenny, but the defeat and loss of life reduced the morale and confidence of the insurgents, while boosting the morale and confidence of the government troops.

The government victory at New Ross was the turning point for the uprising in Wexford. The battle was characterised by numerous attacks and counter-attacks that lasted throughout the day, with the ebb and flow of the dispersed street fighting causing much confusion on both sides. Harvey's rebel force eventually melted away due to exhaustion and panic that had quickly spread as a result of the number of

⁴³⁹ Daniel Gahan, 'The Military Planning of the 1798 Rebellion in Wexford,' in *The Mighty Wave: The 1798 Rebellion in Wexford*, eds. Daire Keogh & Nicholas Furlong (Dublin, 1996), p. 101

⁴⁴⁰ *Faulkner's Journal*, 9 June 1798, quoted in Nelson, p. 200

casualties sustained in the attack.⁴⁴¹ Thousands of insurgents lost heart in the revolt and simply returned to the homes, while many others flooded back to Wexford town with exaggerated stories of defeat. Victory proved costly for the government with the death of Lord Mountjoy, commander of the Dublin Militia, along with 86 soldiers killed, 58 wounded and five officers and 76 men reported missing.⁴⁴² The loss to the rebels was immense, with one eye witness stating that 62 cart-loads of bodies were dumped into the local river, in addition to 3,400 that were buried in a mass grave.⁴⁴³ However, this may have been an exaggeration, with James Alexander, a prominent loyalist who was tasked with arranging the disposal of the bodies estimating a total of 2,600 deceased rebels, including 1,010 bodies removed from within the town streets.⁴⁴⁴ The battle had also been costly to the United Irish in loss of *materiel*, with a large quantity of muskets and pikes, as well as nineteen field guns, being left behind.⁴⁴⁵ Although not routed, the southern United Irish army of Wexford withdrew back towards Wexford town, where under the new leadership of Father Philip Roche, its main focus was now on the defence of the republic capital and raiding operations.

The government army seized the initiative and went on the offensive with the defeat of a large rebel force at Arklow, County Wicklow. On 9 June the northern United Irish army, estimated to be 19,000 strong and led by Father John Murphy, launched an attack on the government held town in an effort to spread the revolt outside Wexford and march on Dublin.⁴⁴⁶ However, a garrison of 1,335 militia and fencible infantry, along with 500 cavalry, defended the town and had been placed in a strong defensive position on its outskirts by the commanding officer, General

⁴⁴¹ Pakenham, pp. 236-237

⁴⁴² *Faulkner's Journal*, 9 June 1798, quoted in Nelson, p. 200

⁴⁴³ Pakenham, p. 328

⁴⁴⁴ Alexander to Pelham, 10 June 1798 (British Museum, Add MSS 33/105/400), quoted in Pakenham, p. 328

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ Pakenham, p. 281

Needham.⁴⁴⁷ The rebels launched a frontal attack in two columns, but both were eventually forced to withdraw due to high casualties sustained from the superior firepower of the government troops. Unlike New Ross, rebel casualties at Arklow were measured in the hundreds, not thousands, with an estimated 300 bodies being left on the field.⁴⁴⁸ The government casualties were extremely low as very few rebels managed to breach the government lines due to the effective firepower of the artillery.⁴⁴⁹ What makes the government victory at Arklow so significant is that it was the second serious defeat for the insurgents in four days. The government had succeeded in preventing the popular uprising from spreading outside of Wexford and from this point the rebellion began to collapse in the south-east of the kingdom. By 21 June the rebels had retreated to Vinegar Hill, near Enniscorthy, where their consolidated force of approximately 20,000 was surrounded by the converging government forces of four columns commanded by generals Johnson, Duff, Loftus and Needham, and led by Lieutenant General Lake.⁴⁵⁰ The firepower of the government artillery, plus no attempt by the rebels to fortify the position, ensured that the United Irish army was routed with great loss. Although a number managed to escape the encirclement and withdrew to the Wicklow Mountains where they continued a campaign of guerrilla warfare, the serious military threat in Wexford had been extinguished. On the same day Wexford town was recaptured by Brigadier General John Moore, an experienced regular officer who had been in Ireland since 1797, after the column that he led had routed a rebel force at Foulkes Mills the day before. The series of defeats and subsequent government reprisals ensured that the popular support that the United Irish needed for the rebellion to spread and succeed

⁴⁴⁷ Nelson, p. 204

⁴⁴⁸ Needham to Lake, 10 June 1798 (National Archives, HO 100/77)

⁴⁴⁹ Needham to Camden, 10 June 1798 (National Archives, HO 100/73)

⁴⁵⁰ Dickson, p. 214

had quickly dissolved, ensuring that the rebel forces were now reduced to a number of small isolated bands that were easily accounted for in the following mopping-up operations.

In comparison to the rising in Wexford, the rebellion in Ulster failed to gain sufficient popular support and was quickly extinguished. The dragooning of the province by government forces in 1797 and early 1798 ensured that there was little chance of any such rebellion succeeding. The counter-terror activities may have inspired some to take up arms against the government but the fear of reprisals also persuaded many to remain at home when the uprising broke out in Antrim on 7 June. There was dissention within the United Irish leadership in Ulster over the limited chance of success of any uprising without military support from the French, which ensured confusion and luke-warm responses to the call-to-arms.⁴⁵¹ Active popular support for the rebellion was restricted to isolated disaffected locations within counties Antrim and Down, where the traditional democratic philosophies of the dominant, but politically repressed, Presbyterian population led to support for a revolution. Such fractions within the United Irish movement ensured that the rebel forces were easily contained and defeated.

In contrast to the military situation in Wexford, the Irish army was in a stronger position to deal with any rebellion in Ulster in 1798. The province had been the birthplace of the United Irish movement and it was here that the government expected open rebellion to occur. From the time that the militant republican organisation had been outlawed in 1795, Dublin Castle had been generally supportive of the counter-revolutionary measures taken by the army in the north of the kingdom, although the severity of such steps was questioned at times. The policy of disarming

⁴⁵¹ Curtain, pp. 65-66

of Ulster had been in place from March 1797 when General Lake had launched a series of search and seizure operations that had critically weakened the military effectiveness of the insurgents through arrests and seizure of weapons. This seriously disrupted the United Irish executive in Ulster, with R.G. Morton claiming that a 'period of sullen quiescence' within the revolutionary movement remained until the uprising in Antrim and Down the following year.⁴⁵² The fear of an uprising in Ulster also ensured that there was a concentration of troops to counter such action, as well as a strategic plan to contain any rebellion. Major General George Nugent, an experienced and competent officer, commanded the government forces in the north. In June 1798 he had at his disposal approximately 9,000 soldiers, which were mostly Irish militia and British fencibles, along with 5,000 yeomen.⁴⁵³ He had formulated a sound strategy of placing company and troop-sized garrisons of infantry and yeomanry in disaffected locations whilst maintaining a substantial reserve at Blaris Camp, near Belfast. Nugent had also fostered an effective network of informants and spies to provide essential intelligence to counter any insurgent moves. This ensured that when the rebellion did erupt the government forces could quickly regain the military initiative.

The rebellion in Ulster was easily defeated due to confusion and lack of co-ordination within the United Irish leadership. The leadership of the Ulster insurgents was in disarray due to the number of arrests carried out by the government troops. Many of those who had escaped such action were disillusioned by the absence of any French military support and showed little enthusiasm for rebelling. This led to Henry Joy McCracken assuming the responsibility of commander-in-chief of the rebel forces in Antrim. The rebellion in Wexford had inspired him to launch simultaneous attacks

⁴⁵² R.G. Morton, 'Plans for Ulster Defence, 1795-1797,' *The Irish Sword*, vol 2 (1956), pp. 270-274

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 272

on Antrim and Randalstown, County Antrim, on 7 June in an effort to seize the local magistrates that were meeting in Antrim on that date. He mistakenly assumed similar attacks would be conducted by United Irishmen in County Down on the same day. However, poor communications within the organisation ensured that the risings in Antrim and Down became uncoordinated isolated rebellions that were defeated in turn. Had McCracken and Henry Munro, leader of the Down rebellion, been able to conspire to simultaneously launch their attacks, they may have had more success by forcing Nugent to fight on two fronts. However, this was not the case, with the uprising in Down erupting on 9 June at a time when the rebellion in Antrim was effectively spent.

The rebels found little success in Ulster. The insurgents were divided, even before the attack on Antrim town was carried out, due to the defection of 5,000 Catholic Defenders who had previously promised to rise. Many other contingents failed to arrive at the rendezvous point arranged by McCracken, but he eventually gathered together a force of 6,000. However, by the time he launched his attack on the small garrison, unbeknown to him, a reinforcing column of government troops were also entering the town. Prior to the rising General Nugent had received a copy of McCracken's orders from a defecting United Irish colonel by the name of Magin.⁴⁵⁴ This ensured that he could dispatch a sizable force to locate and destroy the main rebel army, as well as relieve the smaller garrisons that had been targeted in McCracken's orders. The rebels had some success with the brief occupation of Randalstown and Ballymena, but their attacks on Larne and Antrim was repulsed due to determined defence by the small garrisons, allowing time for relief columns to arrive. The clash at Antrim was a confused bloody affair, typical of street fighting,

⁴⁵⁴ Stewart, p. 89

which ultimately led to panic amongst the rebels and their retreat from the town, leaving 300 dead.⁴⁵⁵ And although the rebels had succeeded in seizing control of most of the county, except for Carrickfergus and Belfast, the defeat at Antrim had broken the confidence of the insurgents. Wary of possible risings in Belfast and Down, Nugent then successfully negotiated the surrender of rebel arms by offering a general amnesty.

The defeat of the rebels in County Down effectively extinguished the rebellion in the north. On 9 June a mixed force of York Fencibles and local yeomanry were surprised by a large rebel force that had gathered at Saintfield, ten miles east of Belfast. After defeating the government troops, Henry Munro, the rebel leader in Down, marched his army of 7,000 rebels to the important market town of Ballynahinch where they encamped in a wooded park and remained largely inactive. By 12 June General Nugent had advanced on the town from Belfast with a force of 1,500 men, which included the Monaghan Militia, part of the 22nd Dragoons, a detachment of artillery and 600 fencibles.⁴⁵⁶ The following morning Munro led the rebel attack against Nugent's force that held the centre of the town but were subsequently repulsed by artillery fire. Nugent estimated that 3-400 insurgents were killed out of a force of 4-5,000, while his casualties were considerably light with one officer and eight soldiers killed, along with thirteen wounded.⁴⁵⁷ With the capture and execution of Munro the rebel army in Down dissolved, thus effectively ending the rebellion in Ulster. The uprising in the north had lasted only one week and had been a complete failure in attempting to inspire a general rebellion in the province. Ultimately, what resulted was the complete destruction of the United Irish movement

⁴⁵⁵ Pakenham, pp. 251-254

⁴⁵⁶ Nugent to Lake, 13 June 1798 (National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers 620/33/129), quoted in Nelson, p. 207

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

in the north, where the failure of the rising, coupled with the following reprisals ensuring there was little support for any future republican revolts.

The defeat of the rebellion in Ireland in 1798 was due to a number of factors, which included the failure to co-ordinate Presbyterian discontent and Catholic disaffection with a simultaneous French invasion, and the flawed rebel strategy of fighting against government troops in open battle. The decision to launch an uprising without French military support was a gamble that proved disastrous for the revolutionary cause. The rebel strategy of relying on overwhelming the government forces with superior numbers had some merit but was basically flawed. They may have had the initiative when the rebellion was first launched, but once the government forces were able to concentrate, the United Irish armies lacked any trained and disciplined formations needed to successfully confront the government army in open linear-style battle. The counter-terror operations of the government had seriously depleted the number of firearms available to the insurgents, ensuring that the rebel troops had to rely heavily on the use of pikes, which although lethal, were most effective as defensive weapons, such as when attacked by cavalry. This was evident at New Ross where elements of the 4th and 5th Dragoons charged a mob of retreating rebels, only for the pikemen to turn and dispatch the cavalry commanding officer and 28 of his troopers.⁴⁵⁸ The limited number of firearms ensured that the United Irishmen were reliant on the tactic of a shock charge, similar to the tactics used by Jacobite infantry in the 1745 rebellion in Scotland, to engage with the enemy.⁴⁵⁹ This proved successful against poorly trained and numerically inferior formations, such as the North Cork Militia at Oulart Hill. However, as with the Jacobite charge at Culloden in 1746, it proved disastrous against a force of disciplined troops who could maintain

⁴⁵⁸ Pakenham, p. 231

⁴⁵⁹ Kevin Whelan, 'Reinterpreting the 1798 rebellion in County Wexford,' in *The Mighty Wave: The 1798 Rebellion in Wexford*, eds. Daire Keogh & Nicholas Furlong (Dublin, 1996), p. 27

superior fire power, such as the government defence of Arklow.⁴⁶⁰ What also proved significant was that the rebels lacked a sufficient number of trained artilleryists to put the captured field guns to good use. The rebel need for such experience was so desperate that at New Ross they forced captured artillerymen to load and fire the cannons at gun point.⁴⁶¹ The sections of Royal Artillery and Royal Irish Artillery that accompanied the government forces were the best trained and most professional corps within the Irish establishment and it was their ability to maintain constant accurate fire against the rebels that inflicted high casualties on the insurgents that reduced their morale. It was the effect of artillery fire that ensured the defeat of the insurgents at New Ross, Arklow and Vinegar Hill.⁴⁶² By waiting for the landing of a French army the rebellion would have had a greater chance of success. Not only would the French have provided the republican cause with the experienced troops and *materiel* necessary to achieve victory against the Irish army, but Dublin Castle would have had to withdraw regiments from parts of the kingdom in an effort to consolidate its forces to face the French in open battle, thus leaving the defence of large areas of rural Ireland to the inexperienced yeomanry.

The lack of effective leadership within the United Irish movement, which had passed from Ulster to an executive committee in Dublin, was significant in the defeat of the rebel armies. The arrest of the Leinster executive in March of 1798 effectively crippled the United Irish movement, ensuring command and organisational structures were limited to local control, fostering confusion and lack of direction amongst the rebel cells within Dublin and surrounding counties, some who chose not to act without orders from the executive.⁴⁶³ This was evident in every separate uprising,

⁴⁶⁰ Needham to Camden, 10 June 1798 (National Archives, HO 100/68)

⁴⁶¹ Pakenham, p. 235

⁴⁶² Hayes-McCoy, 'The Government Forces Which Opposed the Irish Insurgents of 1798,' pp. 16-28

⁴⁶³ Whelan, p. 23

where indecision prevailed once the rebels had failed to achieve their goals. In Meath the isolated rebel bands drew together at an encampment at Tara and remained there inactive until surrounded and routed.⁴⁶⁴ The republicans responded similarly in Wexford, when they converged on Vinegar Hill and were destroyed after failing to break out of the county. Insufficient military experience amongst the leadership also limited the chance of success, with Lord Fitzgerald being the only member of the executive to have served as an officer in any capacity. There were a small number of deserters from the officer corps of the militia and yeomanry that joined the insurgents, such as Doctor Esmonde at Prosperous, but the prominent leaders of the rebellion were mostly inexperienced civilians.⁴⁶⁵ In Wexford local Catholic parish priests, such as Fathers John and Michael Murphy, as well as Father Philip Roche, were inspirational in leading their disaffected parishioners but were ignorant of military tactics. The same can be said of Anthony Perry and Bagenal Harvey, who as local gentry provided traditional leadership but whose lack of military knowledge seriously jeopardised the success of the revolt. Similarly, the leadership in Ulster was lacking in military experience, with Henry Joy McCracken being a prosperous cotton manufacturer, while Henry Munro was a draper.⁴⁶⁶ It was this lack of military experience and knowledge amongst the leaders that ensured the rebels' armies were decimated on repeated murderous frontal attacks that not only weakened the rebel numerical advantage but eventually broke the morale of the disaffected population.

Another factor in the failure of the rebellion was the lack of active support from the general populace throughout the majority of other counties within the kingdom. British historians, such as R.F. Foster, claim that the French revolution had

⁴⁶⁴ Francis Higgins to Edward Cooke, 25 May 1798 (National Archives, Ireland – Rebellion Papers 620/18/14), quoted in Liam Chambers, 'The 1798 Rebellion in North Leinster,' in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, eds. Thomas Bartlett, et. al. (Dublin, 2003), pp. 125

⁴⁶⁵ Pakenham, p. 127

⁴⁶⁶ Nelson, pp. 206-207

polarised the Irish population and that there was large-scale support amongst liberal Protestants, Presbyterians and Catholics for a similar uprising in Ireland to provide male suffrage and Catholic emancipation.⁴⁶⁷ Arguably, this may have been true amongst the educated middle-classes but not so for the Catholic peasantry, most of whom could not read.⁴⁶⁸ The revolutionary ideology fostered by the United Irish was a foreign concept to the uneducated Irish peasantry and the idea of a democratic nation governed by the people was alien to the peasantry that had traditionally relied on the aristocracy for leadership and protection.⁴⁶⁹ They had always been ruled by kings and the Irish Catholics had generally remained loyal to the exiled House of Stuart throughout the eighteenth century. The French revolutionary philosophies were extremely secular and critical of the influence the Catholic Church had over the state.⁴⁷⁰ Any such propaganda distributed by the United Irish would have discouraged many Catholics from participating in a rebellion that threatened the continuation of their religious practice. The fact that the Catholic bishops in Ireland, together with the Catholic Committee, had actively discouraged their flock from supporting any insurrection would most certainly have accounted for the general lack of popular support. This was evident in the open displays of loyalty and support by the peasantry in the south of the kingdom towards the crown forces marching to counter Hoche's invasion in 1796.⁴⁷¹ They had a basic fear that the United Irish were in league with the French to drive Catholics off the land.⁴⁷² This suspicion is understandable when considering that the United Irish was mainly based in Ulster amongst educated young

⁴⁶⁷ R.F Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London & New York, 1988), pp. 264-266

⁴⁶⁸ Gerard O'Brien, 'Francophobia in later eighteenth-century Irish History,' in *Ireland and the French Revolution*, eds. Hugh Gough & David Dickinson (Dublin, 1990), p.49

⁴⁶⁹ Cronin, pp. 107-111

⁴⁷⁰ O'Brien, p. 49

⁴⁷¹ William O'Connor Morris, 'Ireland, 1793-1800,' *The English Historical Review*, vol. 6, no. 24 (October, 1891), pp. 713

⁴⁷² Cronin, p. 110

radicals of the middle classes who saw Catholicism as an oppressive religion based on superstition.

One point that traditional and revisionist historians, such as Musgrave and Bartlett, agree on is that as viceroy, the earl of Camden was ineffective in providing decisive leadership in a time of national crisis. As lord lieutenant, Camden was also head of the military establishment in Ireland, although at the time he had a designated commander-in-chief of the army, Lieutenant General Lake, who served under him and was responsible for the administration and operational control of the armed forces. However, although Camden openly displayed a lack of confidence in Lake and the troops under his command, believing their quality and numbers were inadequate to deal with the rebels, he encouraged Lake to carry out counter-terror campaigns knowing that such measures would lead to more disaffection amongst the population.⁴⁷³ He saw rebellion as an opportunity to crush dissention in Ireland, however, once the uprising had begun, he faltered when he became infected with the panic that quickly spread throughout Dublin and the Ascendancy.⁴⁷⁴ This panic was fuelled by the numerous reports received from panic-stricken gentry and magistrates throughout the kingdom, with Camden writing to the British Home secretary demanding troops be sent from Britain to help end the revolt: 'Unless great Britain pours an immense force into Ireland, the country is lost. Unless she sends her most able generals those troops may be sacrificed...from the delay in sending the reinforcements which were promised, the rebellion has much extended itself, that it now assumes so formidable a shape that I think it my duty to state...the country is lost, unless a very large reinforcement of troops is landed.'⁴⁷⁵ This comment is significant in that by the time he wrote this letter on 11 June, the rebels in Meath and

⁴⁷³ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 270

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Camden to Pelham, 11 June 1798 (National Archives, HO 100/77)

Kildare had been defeated and had surrendered, while the rebellion in Wexford had been contained with the United Irish defeats at New Ross and Arklow. By this time the government forces had seized the initiative, forcing the insurgents to withdraw to Vinegar Hill and at this stage it was only in two counties in Ulster that the rebels had any chance of overwhelming the Irish army. Camden also came under attack from members of the Ascendancy for his inertia and was heavily criticised for preventing Lake from marching out of Dublin with a column to reinforce General Dundas in Kildare. He repeatedly argued that the security of the capital was paramount, stating that no such mission could take place until reinforcements arrived in the city from Britain.⁴⁷⁶ This led to the rural gentry of the county claiming that they had been abandoned by the army and government, resulting in many being unnecessarily murdered in their homes by rebel mobs.

The actions of some senior army officers fostered a contemporary belief that the military hierarchy proved ineffective during the revolt. This perception was initiated by Abercromby's comments earlier that year, and reinforced by later criticism from Camden and others within the army, such as Sir John Moore. Camden had little confidence in his commander-in-chief, which may have attributed to Lake's actions against with the rebels: 'General Lake is not fit to command in these difficult times...He has no arrangement, is easily led, and no authority...I am sure you must be aware how very unpleasantly circumstanced I am without a commander-in-chief upon whom I have the most perfect reliance.'⁴⁷⁷ Other generals were berated for their lack of aggression against the insurgents, especially by loyalists who suffered at the hands of the rebels. Major General Sir Ralph Dundas was heavily criticised by the Ascendancy for his strategic decision to withdraw his scattered detachments in

⁴⁷⁶ Pakenham, p. 154

⁴⁷⁷ Camden to Pelham, 6 June 1798 (National Archives, HO 100/77)

Kildare to concentrate at Naas when the rebellion first erupted.⁴⁷⁸ This ensured that the whole of the county was abandoned to the rebels who were able to target the unprotected Protestant gentry. With the benefit of hindsight the criticism against Dundas was understandable. However, at the time he was not aware of the general failure of the United Irish and had prudently decided to concentrate his troops rather than leave them exposed in isolated positions where they could have been annihilated by overwhelming superior numbers, especially as Camden had refused to send reinforcements from Dublin. His greatest censure came when on 28 May he negotiated generous, but unauthorised terms for the surrender of 6,000 insurgents at Gibbet Rath.⁴⁷⁹ He was ridiculed for such humane actions by Lake, who on 24 May had ordered no prisoners to be taken, as well as the vengeful Ascendant population who were clearly seeking a more brutal end to the uprising.⁴⁸⁰ Other officers to suffer public criticism were Major General Fawcett, who led a column from Duncannon Fort to relieve Wexford town, but was ambushed and hastily retreated, making no further advances into rebel-held territory, while Major General Johnson was described by Cornwallis as being 'no soldier.'⁴⁸¹ However, the comment regarding Johnson seems somewhat unjustified considering it was he who rallied the panicking militia at New Ross and inflicted a major defeat on the United Irish.

Ultimately, the high command of the Irish establishment proved competent enough to crush the rebellion. Justified criticism has been aimed at Lake for causing much disaffection amongst the population prior to the uprising through his brutal disarming campaigns, as well as encouraging many rebels to continue to fight by authorising atrocities during and after the uprising. However, he managed to

⁴⁷⁸ Nelson, p. 186

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' p. 279

⁴⁸¹ Martin, p. 298

formulate the successful strategy of containment that led to the defeat of the revolt in Wexford, using mainly the inexperienced and semi-trained militia and fencibles that made up the majority of the military force in Ireland at the time. Some of his subordinates forged admirable military reputations during the rebellion, especially Brigadier General John Moore who was later knighted and promoted for his recapture of Wexford town. Cornwallis was so impressed with Moore that he gave him independent command of the elite force used to combat the small insurgent groups who had retreated into the Wicklow Mountains once the main rebel army had been destroyed in Wexford.⁴⁸² Major General George Nugent also proved himself worthy of high praise with his swift and total destruction of the United Irish armies in Antrim and Down within a week. Others, such as General Sir James Duff and General Sir James Craig were commended by Lake and members of the Ascendancy for their zeal in leading counter-insurgent operations, which although merciless, proved effective in extinguishing the rebellion in the areas they commanded.⁴⁸³

The British government proved effective in preventing the revolt of 1798 from becoming as widespread as a similar insurrection mounted by the Royalists of the *Vendee* in France. The eighteenth-century British army was generally not well-suited or equipped for counter-insurgent operations, being numerically small and with training restricted to musket and formation drill specific to linear warfare. Nonetheless, Dublin Castle had succeeded in weakening the military potential of the United Irish through mass arrests and the seizure of arms during the counter-insurgent operations of 1797-1798, especially in Ulster where weapons had been retained by previous members of volunteer associations. Dublin Castle had also succeeded in penetrating the United Irish movement by cultivating an intelligence network that

⁴⁸² Ross, p. 277

⁴⁸³ Bartlett, p. 279

provided details of planned actions.⁴⁸⁴ This ensured that pre-emptive strikes could be made against the cause, such as the arrest of the Leinster executive committee, which would seriously hinder rebel success. Information regarding the planned uprising also ensured that government troops could be concentrated in strength at locations targeted by the insurgents, such as prominent government buildings in Dublin. Certainly, the failure of United Irish to gain widespread active support throughout the country limited the chance of the rising to becoming a national revolution, thus limiting its likelihood of success. When the rebellion came the government troops quickly isolated and defeated the rebel forces, thus preventing the revolt from spreading and discouraging others from rising in support. The ability to make good use of secure internal sea links through the Irish Sea ensured reinforcements available from Britain could be sent within a short time, although only several regiments had arrived prior to the rebellion being effectively crushed at Vinegar Hill. However, the rapid influx of units from Britain ensured that Cornwallis had a large enough army to easily surround and defeat the small French invasion force led by General Humbert at Ballinamuck, County Longford, on 8 September the same year.

The rebellion was characterised by atrocities committed by both the rebels and government forces, contributing to thousands of deaths of surrendering antagonists and non-combatants. The precise number of people killed during the uprising and the subsequent invasion by the French could never be established due to the high number of civilians involved. The nature of the United Irish peasant armies meant that there were no regular military formations where muster roles would have provided an exact number of combatants and casualties. Therefore, the most accurate estimation of the number of lives lost during the conflicts is provided by contemporary records and

⁴⁸⁴ Pakenham, p. 89-90

observation made by those who witnessed the events. The estimation of the total number of those killed varies from 20-30,000, although many historians now tend to accept a figure of 25,000 as being realistic.⁴⁸⁵ This became the bloodiest civil conflict in Ireland since the Civil Wars of the 1640s and 1650s, and the Williamite War of 1689-1693. When comparing the official casualty figures provided for the Irish government forces to the estimated total deaths during the uprising and French invasion, it is clear that the vast majority of those killed were either civilian insurgents or non-combatants. The number of those killed in battle is easily accounted for by the number of bodies recovered and disposed of. However, it is impossible to account for the thousands of civilians, both Catholic and Protestant, who were slaughtered indiscriminately while attempting to escape from the conflict or who had the misfortune of living in the location where the rebellion erupted.

Numerous atrocities during the uprising were initially inspired by the actions of government troops during the disarming campaigns, as well as religious fervour and fear promoted by both the Ascendancy and the republicans.⁴⁸⁶ News of such events quickly spread, fostering a hardening of attitudes and promoting a sense of desperation amongst the belligerents. Heinous acts were repeatedly committed by factions who now saw the conflict as a struggle for survival, typical of civil wars where the normal rules of society are disregarded. The temporary eviction of government troops from Wexford allowed many rebels to seek vengeance for past oppression by attacking and murdering loyalist gentry and citizens who had been held prisoner in the town gaol.⁴⁸⁷ News that troops at New Ross had hanged or shot every rebel they had found created hysteria in Wexford that led to the massacre of 97

⁴⁸⁵ Bartlett, p. 287

⁴⁸⁶ Pakenham, p. 174

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 296-297

loyalist men and women prisoners at the town bridge by a republican mob.⁴⁸⁸ The other most notorious rebel atrocity occurred at Scullabogue on the day the United Irish were defeated at New Ross, where more than 100 loyalist prisoners, including women and children, and some Catholics, were burned in a barn after 35 men had already been shot in front of their families.⁴⁸⁹ Such incidents only promoted further murderous activity which ensured that the majority of deaths were suffered by non-combatant from both sides.

However, some atrocities committed by government troops had been given official sanction. Lake's order of 24 May that no rebel prisoners were to be taken during the military operations became common knowledge throughout the kingdom ensuring that quarter was seldom given by either side. The rebellion now became a conflict where only the complete eradication of the enemy forces would ensure victory. The eighteenth century was dubbed as the 'age of reason' where unwritten rules of war were accepted by civilised European states.⁴⁹⁰ The voluntary 'laws of nations' that were the accepted rules of conduct of between warring European states, prohibited measures that were themselves unlawful, including the massacre of an enemy who had surrendered.⁴⁹¹ In the 1798 rebellion these rules were ignored by many within the Irish military establishment, especially the yeomanry, who zealously followed Lake's lead. An example was General Duff who authorised the massacre of 350 rebel prisoners at Gibbet Rath on 31 May after they had already negotiated terms with General Dundas.⁴⁹² This was followed by the standard practice of dispatching all rebel wounded found on the battlefield, as well as the indiscriminate execution of

⁴⁸⁸ Hewitt, pp. 91-92

⁴⁸⁹ Pakenham, pp. 226-227

⁴⁹⁰ E. Vattel, *The Law of Nations or Principles of the Law of Nature Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns*, new edition by Joseph Chitty (London, 1834), pp. 369-370

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Liam Chambers, 'The 1798 Rebellion in North Leinster,' in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, eds. Thomas Bartlett, et.al. (Dublin, 2003), p. 126

insurgent suspects.⁴⁹³ Such actions were vigorously carried out by government troops at Vinegar Hill, where the rebel hospital in nearby Enniscorthy was burned while the wounded were still inside.⁴⁹⁴ These practices that were promoted by Lake were considered ruthless by many of his contemporaries, with Cornwallis giving a clear indication of the state of affairs in a letter to the duke of Portland on his arrival in Ireland: 'The accounts that you see of the numbers of the enemy destroyed in every action, are, I conclude, greatly exaggerated; from my own knowledge of military affairs, I am sure that a very small proportion of them only could be killed in battle, and I am much afraid that any man in a brown coat who is found within several miles of the field of action, is butchered without discrimination.'⁴⁹⁵

The responsibility of the atrocities committed by the government forces, including the militia, during the rebellion and subsequent French invasion lies with the high command. Lake's orders, especially in regard to the order to refuse quarter to surrendering rebels at Ballinamuck, were certainly in breach of these principles and it could be argued that his directive removed all culpability from his subordinates and troops for their murderous actions. According to these rules of war, a general had the right to sacrifice the lives of his enemy to ensure his safety and that of his own men if he was dealing with an inhumane foe who frequently commits 'enormities.'⁴⁹⁶ This authorised him to refuse quarter to some of his prisoners and to treat them as his people have been treated. However, unlike the earlier United Irish uprising, the discipline of the French forces during the failed invasion had ensured very few atrocities were committed by their rebel allies.⁴⁹⁷ It is clear that Lake certainly believed that the rebellion seriously threatened the survival of the Ascendancy, and

⁴⁹³ Dickson, p. 214

⁴⁹⁴ Pakenham, p. 2

⁴⁹⁵ Ross, pp. 354-355

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Hayes, 'An Officers Account of the French Campaign in Ireland in 1798,' pp. 161-171

that the uncivilised actions of some of the rebels placed him in such a position: 'I really feel most severely being obliged to order so many men out of the world; but I am convinced, if severe and many examples are not made, the Rebellion cannot be put to a stop.'⁴⁹⁸ Certainly, the generals were within their rights to order the destruction of homes and property of known insurgents and supporters if by depriving them of their property they were weakening the enemy in order to render him incapable of supporting unjust violence and depriving the rebels of means of resistance.⁴⁹⁹

However, the deaths of so many women, children and sick and feeble old men, who were either camp followers or had the misfortune of living in areas of insurrection, was unjustifiable. Lake's attitude towards the rebels was a reflection of the belligerent sentiment of the Ascendancy which had resulted from insurgent activity prior to the uprising, with his order to refuse quarter to rebel prisoners being made before the alleged atrocities of the rebel mobs had been committed. There is no doubt that the indiscipline of some of the government troops, as well as that of the insurgent armies, would have led to some atrocities being carried out by both sides. However, although much blame was conveniently aimed at the ill-discipline of the Irish militia, the ultimate liability lies with their commander-in-chief. During this period the 'Law of Nations' removed any accountability from the officers and soldiers as they were considered as instruments of war for the sovereign and state, where they executed his will and not their own.⁵⁰⁰ However, in the case of the Irish Rebellion of 1798 the responsibility of the systematic butchering of rebel suspects and prisoners lies directly with Lake. The orders that he issued were of his own volition and had not been sanctioned by the crown. It could be argued that Camden must share some

⁴⁹⁸ Lake to Castlereagh, 22 June 1798, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*, vol. 1., ed. Marquis of Londonderry (London, 1848), pp. 223-224

⁴⁹⁹ Vattel, pp. 299 & 361

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 293

responsibility, as his weakness at preventing such measures resulted in both he and Lake being replaced by Lord Cornwallis in late June, before the rebellion had finally been extinguished.

The opposite approach taken by Cornwallis towards the insurgents led to a less blood-thirsty end to the rebellion. When he took office as the lord-lieutenant and commander-in-chief of the armed forces in Ireland on 22 June 1798 he was convinced the actions promoted by Lake had left the rebels with no other option but to remain fighting: 'The violence of our friends, and their folly in endeavouring to make it a religious war, added to the ferocity of our troops who delight in murder, most powerfully counteract all plans of conciliation.'⁵⁰¹ By this time the rebellion was restricted to guerrilla-style warfare in the Wicklow Mountains. In an attempt to end hostilities he directed General Moore and a force of regular troops that he could depend on to confront the rebels to 'try either to seduce them or invite them to surrender, for the shocking barbarity of our national troops would be more likely to provoke rebellion than to suppress it.'⁵⁰² However, Cornwallis firmly believed that the system of counter-terror carried out by the government forces was led by the Protestant Ascendancy who were adverse to all acts of clemency. This belief was reinforced during the French invasion, when General Lake who as a firm supporter of the Ascendancy, ordered that no quarter be given to the Irish rebels who were attempting to surrender with their French allies at Ballinamuck on 8 September.⁵⁰³ It was his belief that principal members of both houses of parliament were willing to pursue measures that would see an attempt to exterminate the Catholic peasantry who made up 80 per cent of the population, leading to irreconcilable rebellion and the

⁵⁰¹ Cornwallis to Major General Ross, 1 July 1798, Ross, p. 355

⁵⁰² Cornwallis to Major General Ross, 28 July 1798, Ross, p. 377

⁵⁰³ Pakenham, p. 373

destruction of the country.⁵⁰⁴ Ultimately, it was Cornwallis's humane and just treatment of those insurgents remaining under arms after Vinegar Hill and Ballinamuck, but who had later surrendered, that convinced many insurgents to lay down their arms.

The unsuccessful French invasion of Ireland in the same year was an ill-advised and maverick campaign that provided nothing more than an epilogue to the 1798 rebellion. When the United Irishmen launched their uprising in May of that year, their hope was that the insurrection would prompt the French to send an invasion force of regular troops needed to promote their success. However, when the long-awaited expedition did arrive, it proved to be too little and too late for the rebel cause that had effectively been destroyed at Vinegar Hill. Dublin Castle was shocked when news of the landing reached the capital, but at the time the Irish army had sufficient strength to defeat such a small force. The subsequent defeat of the government force at Castlebar, County Mayo, was an embarrassment to the crown and did cause concern within the kingdom, but without reinforcements and the promised general uprising of the Irish peasantry, the French and their Irish allies were doomed to defeat. However, a lasting consequence of the campaign was the permanently tarnished reputation of the Irish militia. Revisionist historians such as Nelson and Bartlett argue that this perpetual memory of the corps, especially in regard to the reports of militiamen deserting to the enemy, was politically motivated by the Protestant Ascendancy who were untrusting and fearful of armed Catholics who potentially threatened the current social order in the kingdom.⁵⁰⁵ Such attitudes subsequently led to major changes in the military establishment in Ireland.

⁵⁰⁴ Ross, p. 357

⁵⁰⁵ Nelson, p. 230

The element of surprise ensured initial success for the French invasion. On 22 August 1798 a fleet of three frigates and one corvette carried a small French army into Killala Bay, County Mayo. Initially meant more as a reconnaissance force for an intended larger army that was still gathering in France, the number landed was certainly insufficient to pose a major threat to the Irish government. Under the experienced command of General Jean Joseph Humbert, the French force comprised 888 infantrymen (mainly of the 70th demi-brigade), 42 artillerymen, 57 cavalry troopers (mostly of the 3rd Chasseurs a cheval) and 35 staff.⁵⁰⁶ The French had been militarily unprepared to offer substantial support when the United Irish had risen in May; their navy was weak, finance was limited and a large number of their available forces were already earmarked for Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt. Due mainly to the promises of the Irish republican, Wolfe Tone, that a French invasion would be supported by a general uprising, plans were hastily formulated for an 8,000 man expedition to be led by General Hardy.⁵⁰⁷ However, political intrigue within the French Directory, possibly promoted by Count d'Antraigues who was receiving payments from Pitt's secret service, ensured the withholding of the necessary funds to mount the large-scale operation.⁵⁰⁸ Subsequently, Humbert embarked without waiting for Hardy's troops and after escaping detection by the Royal Navy successfully landed unopposed at the isolated coastal village of Killala. Humbert's rash actions jeopardised the success of the whole venture, with the news of his landing leading to the forfeiture of surprise and tightening of the naval blockade of the French coast that hindered Hardy from providing the necessary reinforcements.

Although Humbert proved successful in defeating the initial forces sent to oppose him, he was effectively leading a 'Forlorn Hope'. Victory in a skirmish at

⁵⁰⁶ Murtagh, 'General Humbert's Futile Campaign,' p. 177

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 176

⁵⁰⁸ Hayes, *The Last Invasion of Ireland* (Dublin, 1979), p. 9

Ballina with a small force of local yeomanry opened the way for the French to march further into the interior. On 27 August Humbert routed 1,700 troops under Lake's command at Castlebar, which caused major embarrassment to the military establishment.⁵⁰⁹ Humbert immediately set up a provisional government in the town, which according to his second-in-command, General Jean Sarrazin, was mainly for the purpose of providing bread for the troops.⁵¹⁰ The French remained in the town for nine days awaiting news of a landing by Hardy and were disappointed with the small number of disaffected Irishmen that had joined them. Without receiving any reinforcements from France and with news of four columns of government troops, amounting to 11,000 men, converging on his position, Humbert was now on the defensive. He was convinced by Sarrazin that their best option was to march into the interior to support the insurgents who had risen in counties Westmeath and Longford, before continuing their march onto Dublin with the intention of releasing imprisoned United Irish leaders.⁵¹¹ On 4 September, the day before Cornwallis began his advance on Castlebar from Hollymount, less than twenty miles to the south, Humbert led a column of 840 Frenchmen, 600 Irish and four cannon, north toward Ulster.⁵¹² Marching in this direction was meant as a *ruse de guerre* to convince Cornwallis to directly follow, ensuring that Humbert would not be outflanked before crossing the river Shannon.⁵¹³ At Collooney, County Sligo, a skirmish took place where the Limerick Militia were routed after they had attempted to intercept the invading force. This proved to be a pyrrhic victory for the French who not only sustained 40 casualties, but who were now hotly pursued by the converging crown troops.⁵¹⁴ Three

⁵⁰⁹ Hayes, 'The Battle of Castlebar,' pp. 107-114

⁵¹⁰ Hayes, 'An Officers Account of the French Campaign in Ireland in 1798,' pp. 161-171

⁵¹¹ Ibid. p. 163

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., p. 165

days later, after a forced march of 120 miles, the exhausted French column was finally surrounded at Ballinamuck, County Longford, where they were forced to surrender after putting up some token resistance.

Three main factors determined the failure of the French invasion. Firstly, the inability of the French to effectively coordinate the simultaneous landing of all the troops allocated for the campaign hindered any chance of success. The force of 8,000 experienced men intended for the invasion would have posed a serious military threat to Dublin Castle, who could only rely on the few regular regiments that had remained in the kingdom after being sent from Britain during the rebellion.⁵¹⁵ An even larger expedition under the command of Irish-born, General Kilmaine, was being gathered at Brest to reinforce Hardy, and had it actually sailed to Ireland, avoiding the naval blockade, the French would have been able to field an army of nearly 20,000 experienced troops.⁵¹⁶ However, the French plan was flawed through the near impossibility of having the separate forces embarking from Rochefort, Dunkirk and Brest converging on the west coast of Ireland at the same time. The weather determined when the fleets could sail and then they had to negotiate the blockade of the Royal Navy. Secondly, the location of the landing was unsuitable. The province of Connacht was the least likely region to rise in support of the invasion. Although there was widespread sympathy for the rebel cause, the United Irish were poorly organised in the western counties, with the Catholic Defenders very weak as a result of Carhampton's counter-insurgent measures in 1795.⁵¹⁷ The French were reliant on the population rising up against the government not only to provide an auxiliary force to augment their army, but also to ensure the dispersal of crown troops to counter insurrection. The third factor that finally sealed the fate of the French invasion was

⁵¹⁵ Murtagh, p. 176

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

the ability of the Royal Navy to intercept the subsequent French fleets carrying reinforcements. On 12 October a British naval squadron under Admiral Warren engaged a French fleet commanded by Admiral Bompard near Lough Swilly, Donegal. Bompard was carrying General Hardy and a force of 3,000 men, which was the largest of the expeditionary forces sent to Ireland. Six of the nine French ships were taken, along with Wolfe Tone, the United Irishman who had been instrumental in persuading the French to invade. Four days before the surrender at Ballinamuck, a small expedition of only 270 grenadiers had sailed from Dunkirk, which included another Irish republican, Napper Tandy. However, by the time the fleet had reached Rutland, County Donegal on 16 September, news of Humbert's surrender resulted in its immediate return to France and the abandonment of Kilmaine's reinforcing expedition. Depending on what could be captured through invasion, realistically, the dominance of the Royal Navy would have made the resupply of any sizable French force in Ireland near impossible, ensuring its isolation and eventual defeat.

The increase in the military establishment of Ireland during the rebellion ensured Cornwallis's defeat of the French invasion. Camden's repeated calls for reinforcements during the uprising had led to an influx of British regular, fencible and militia regiments into the kingdom. At the time of the French landing Cornwallis had approximately 100,000 men under his command in Ireland, although only 10,000 were regulars. News of the invasion ensured that another 10,000 were sent from Britain in September, but the French had been defeated before most had arrived.⁵¹⁸ The inexperienced militia, fencibles and yeomanry remained the greater part of the government force available to meet the threat. The most professional element of Cornwallis's force was the Royal Irish Artillery which consisted of a battalion of 'six-

⁵¹⁸ Ferguson, pp. 179-183

pounder' cannon that had a round-shot range of 600-800 metres. These guns proved most effective in engaging and dispersing the enemy well before they could get into musket range.

It was the ability to coordinate and concentrate superior forces that ensured victory for Cornwallis. When Humbert landed at Killala, the government had less than 4,000 troops in Connacht, and those they had were mainly militia and yeomanry under the command of General Hutchinson.⁵¹⁹ In a rash move, and against the orders of Cornwallis, Hutchinson divided his forces and marched from Galway with a combined force of 1,700 men to take up a position at Castlebar in an effort to gain intelligence regarding the movements of the enemy.⁵²⁰ The new lord-lieutenant had dispatched General Lake to take command of the government troops west of the River Shannon, and he arrived at Castlebar on 26 August, the night before the French attack. By this time, Cornwallis himself was heading towards Connacht with a column of 7,000 men hoping to engage the French only once he had reinforced Lake.⁵²¹ However, as a result of Humbert's victory at Castlebar, the commander-in-chief had to formulate a new strategy that involved the convergence of three columns to surround the invaders. Cornwallis then ordered General Nugent to march to Enniskillen to prevent Humbert from moving into Ulster, while he directed General Hewitt to assemble the available troops from the south and east at Portumna to create a blocking force to prevent any movement on Dublin. Cornwallis took control of the offensive in the west and followed the French, hoping to prevent them crossing the Shannon. A light force commanded by Colonel Robert Craufurd, constantly harried the French column from the rear, leading to exhausting forced marches by the French

⁵¹⁹ Murtagh, p. 181

⁵²⁰ Ross, pp. 411-412

⁵²¹ Murtagh, p. 183

which eventually led to a break down on morale.⁵²² Although Cornwallis was criticised in some quarters, especially from prominent members of the Ascendancy with whom he had previously clashed, for initially being too timid in his handling of the campaign, his strategy proved effective. The French were defeated and captured at Ballinamuck on 8 September, only eighteen days after they had landed, while the few Irish rebels that rose in support of the invasion had either been killed, captured or dispersed. This second defeat, coupled with the oppressive mopping-up operations, proved devastating for the republican cause, with the enduring images and experiences of death and destruction remaining with an Irish population that never again challenged the might of the military establishment in open combat until the Easter Rising of 1916, more than a century later.

The atrocities committed by the government forces in the rebellion were repeated during the French invasion campaign. Unlike the earlier uprising, the French received minimal popular support. The insurgents that did rise up were mainly restricted to around 600-700 rebels that joined Humbert when he landed at Killala, followed by around 3,000 after the victory at Castlebar, which included some militiamen and yeomen.⁵²³ However, apart from the few middle-class Catholics, such as James MacDonnell, who were made officers, the majority of rebels were of poor peasant stock and prone to desertion. A small number of rebels also enlisted in the French force when the column marched into the interior, while several thousand had risen up in Counties Longford and Westmeath hoping to link up with Humbert. Once defeated, the French were humanely treated as prisoners of war, especially the officers who were paroled and entertained in Dublin. However, the Irish officers, including those officially in the French army, such as Humbert's adjutant, Bartholomew

⁵²² Hayes, 'An Officers Account of the French Campaign in Ireland in 1798,' p. 165

⁵²³ Ibid.

Teeling, were treated as traitors and subsequently executed, mostly without trial. At Ballinamuck, General Lake promoted the slaughter of the Irish levies by encouraging the cavalry to run the rebels down instead of accepting their surrender.⁵²⁴ Captain Pakenham, the lieutenant-general of the government ordnance, told the rebels to run before they were cut down but the warning came too late. Of the 1,000 rebels still with the French at the time of surrender over 200 were indiscriminately killed while either trying to surrender or attempting to escape.⁵²⁵ However, about 90 insurgents were taken prisoner on the battlefield only to be executed a short time later, including nine deserters from the Longford Militia who had joined the French at Castlebar.⁵²⁶ Prior to this the rebels in the midlands suffered the same fate. On 5 September at Wilson's Hospital, near Longford, more than 200 rebels were hunted down and killed by a force of local yeomanry and Highland fencibles while the insurgents were negotiating a surrender, while at Granard an unsuccessful attack on the garrison led to a rout of the rebels and the massacre of more than 400 insurgents, many of them while attempting to surrender.⁵²⁷ The bloodshed continued with the end of the campaign in County Mayo, where 400 rebels were sabred to death by fencible cavalry in the streets of Killala on 23 September after their attempts to surrender were refused.⁵²⁸ Subsequently, the zeal of the military forces, especially the yeomanry, ensured that many innocent civilians, including women, children and priests, became victims of an unofficial counter-insurgent policy of extermination that remains a stain on the reputation of the Irish army of the period.

Ultimately, the defeat of the rebellion and the French invasion marked a turning point in the military establishment of Ireland. The violent times had ensured

⁵²⁴ Hayes, *The Last Invasion of Ireland*, p.297

⁵²⁵ Pakenham, p. 373

⁵²⁶ Ibid., p. 374

⁵²⁷ Ibid., pp. 371-372

⁵²⁸ Murtagh, p. 186

that attitudes had hardened with sectarianism coming to the fore. The Protestant Ascendancy would no longer tolerate the defence of the kingdom being left to the militia, which was seen by many as providing the Catholic peasantry with the means to rise again. The uprising and subsequent invasion had ensured that the British government were determined to maintain the security of Ireland as part of the defence of Britain, which necessitated political dominance from London through an act of union. Ireland was now to be not only a major recruiting ground for the expanding armed forces of Britain, but it was to be turned into a military bastion that would effectively lead to a lasting military occupation of the kingdom.

Chapter 6

Outcomes from 1798

The purpose of this chapter is to bring into context the post-rebellion policies of Britain concerning Ireland. In short, there is compelling primary source evidence that proves that the British government believed it could not rely on the defence of Ireland by the Irish, and that it systematically established a military occupation of the kingdom. John Cookson points to this in his book *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815*, using evidence of troop numbers and increased infrastructure, such as barrack building to prove this. Such data proves compelling when compared with official correspondence between Cornwallis and the Home Office. This chapter provides a more comprehensive analysis of the post-rebellion policies concerning Ireland than Cookson has been able to provide in his work that concentrates more on the defence of Britain. Cookson is of the view that the militia interchange system was a deliberate policy instigated to reduce the number of armed Catholics in Ireland, which in effect resulted in a Protestant ‘armed hegemony’.⁵²⁹ However, although this may have been favoured by the Ascendancy, there is no surviving official correspondence that confirms this theory. What has become obvious through close examination of relevant documents, such as regiment returns and personal correspondence, is that Irish Catholics proved to be loyal to the crown and became an important facet of the British military forces, despite negative propaganda fostered by the Ascendancy. What is also apparent, and not part of the traditional historiography promoted by either nineteenth-century Ascendancy or British historians, is that the Irish yeomanry were not fully trusted by the British administration, due to the potential power of the para-military

⁵²⁹ Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815*, p. 156

organisation, and that the military occupation of Ireland was as much to keep the corps in check as it was to defend against Catholic insurrection or French invasion.

The upheavals of 1798 were to have a lasting effect on the military establishment of Ireland. Post-rebellion politics heavily influenced the composition and use of the armed forces in the kingdom, with the Act of Union bringing Ireland under the direct control of the Westminster parliament in 1801. The importance of Ireland in the overall security of Britain was more appreciated during the wars with France, where the kingdom was perceived acutely as the soft-underbelly in the defence of the realm. The potential for invasion and the constant fear of renewed insurrection prompted Pitt and Cornwallis to convince the various factions within the Irish society that their interests would now best be served by being governed from London. Surprisingly, it was the mistrusted Catholic population that gave the greatest support to the Union, with the Protestant Ascendancy hesitant to relinquish political control.⁵³⁰ However, it was the Act of Union that eventually brought greater stability to the country, while strengthening the position of the Protestant minority. This came about by the rapid augmentation of the yeomanry through the mobilization of the Protestant male population, which in effect supplanted the role of the militia in the garrison. The political and sectarian-motivated attitudes which led to the poor reputation that the Irish Militia had been labelled with from the events of 1798 ensured that this force could not be trusted by the Ascendancy and government in the defence of the kingdom. This ensured that the militia was now seen as an institution for providing semi-trained recruits to the regular army or relegated to provide garrisons where loyal forces could supervise them. Ireland became a major source of military manpower, especially when the threat of invasion lessened after 1805 and

⁵³⁰ Cronin, pp. 114-116

with the renewed determination of the Irish Catholics to prove their loyalty to the crown ensuring little support for any future attempted uprising, such as Emmet's rebellion in 1803.⁵³¹ British regular, fencible (until 1802) and militia regiments were continually posted and rotated throughout Ireland post-1798 to counter the perceived unreliability of the militia, ensuring that in effect the Catholic population were placed under the military occupation of Protestant forces.

The most significant political response to the events of 1798 was the Act of Union. Ireland was in a state of chaos that was seen to threaten the security of Britain. British Prime Minister, William Pitt and his supporters were of the opinion that it was better to have the kingdom included in the British state and governed from a single parliament than to allow the continuation of a neighbouring semi-independent state, whose volatile domestic issues and poor state of defence seriously compromised the defence of the realm.⁵³² Pitt was hopeful that by drawing Ireland into the British union the power of the Irish Ascendancy could be broken, leading to a greater inclusion of Catholics and Presbyterian dissenters in the political process through emancipation which he had indicated would occur through the union, thus, ultimately ensuring less internal tension.⁵³³ The violence and destruction experienced in the rebellion and French invasion ensured that more factions within Irish society were now amenable to a union with Britain. Pitt had gained general Catholic support for the move by indicating full emancipation for Catholics under the union, an entitlement that they were unlikely to receive from the Ascendancy, especially in the wake of the uprising which had seen the total destruction of the independence movement. Yet, the move also gained support from many Protestants who preferred a reduction in their

⁵³¹ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion,' p. 288

⁵³² Jacqueline Hill, 'Convergence and conflict in Eighteenth Century Ireland,' *The Historical Journal*, vol. 4, no. 4 (December 2001), pp. 1039-1063

⁵³³ Cronin, pp. 114-116

political powers and the protection of Britain rather than face further domestic insurrection and invasion.⁵³⁴ However, not all of the Irish oligarchy favoured surrendering their power, especially those members of Orange orders who were against the franchising of the Catholic majority. In January 1799, just four months after the last action of the campaign against the French invasion force, the Irish parliament rejected the proposed union. Determined to see the Act of Union come into force, Pitt, assisted by Cornwallis and his chief secretary, Lord Castlereagh, used bribery and bullying tactics to ensure they gained sufficient support in the Irish parliament for the bill to proceed.⁵³⁵ This ensured that the Act was passed when the government next debated the issue on 15 January 1800, where the vote resulted in 138 members supporting the move with 98 opposing it.⁵³⁶ The parliament had voted itself out of existence with the Act of Union taking effect on 1 January 1801, ensuring Ireland was now completely controlled from London.

The events of 1798 and the Act of Union led to military repercussions in Ireland. The most significant was the rise in the dominance of the yeomanry. Thomas Bartlett argues that the continued insurgency from 1798 and 1803, which ended with the failure of Emmet's rebellion in Dublin in July 1803 and the subsequent surrender of Michael Dwyer and his followers, prompted a vital change in the composition of the military force that was to garrison and police the kingdom.⁵³⁷ In the aftermath of the rebellion the yeomanry increasingly replaced the militia in the vanguard of the defence force, where internal security remained the main priority. This shift in military policy was not through any official directive but more from necessity and a lack of faith in the loyalty and capabilities of the militia. As a professional soldier,

⁵³⁴ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion,' p. 292

⁵³⁵ Dickson, p. 217

⁵³⁶ Hill, pp. 1039-1063

⁵³⁷ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion,' p. 290

Cornwallis was angered and reluctant to have to rely on a yeomanry force that he perceived as ill-disciplined and lacking in training: 'these men have saved this country, but now they take the lead in rapine and murder.'⁵³⁸ However, the yeomanry were militarily essential in the defence of Ireland in a period when the demand for regular regiments in foreign campaigns ensured that very few were posted to the Irish establishment. Those units that were sent to the kingdom were generally numerically weak, where it was intended that they recruit up to strength before embarking for other service.⁵³⁹ A proposal for militia interchange with Britain was on the agenda soon after 1798 but was initially rejected due to the anti-Catholic attitude of the king.⁵⁴⁰ Unwilling to rely on the Irish militia and without a substantial number of regular troops to count on, the lord lieutenant was forced to become reliant on the Protestant yeomanry at a time when problems of rising sectarianism in Ireland were secondary to the greater military needs of Britain.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Cavalry</i>	<i>Infantry</i>
Dec. 1796	10,000	10,000
Dec. 1797	18-20,000	15-17,000
May 1798	15,000	21,000
1799	13,000	53,000
Oct. 1801	10,000	40,000
Dec. 1803	9,000	57,000
Dec. 1804	7,000	52,000
Dec. 1805	8,000	58,000
Dec. 1806	6,000	53,000
Dec. 1807	7,000	50,000
Mar. 1810	9,000	71,000
Dec. 1815	100	43,000

Table 6.1 - Yeomanry Cavalry and Infantry Numbers, 1796-1815

(Source: Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 116)

⁵³⁸ Ross, pp. 370-371

⁵³⁹ Earl of Camden to the duke of Portland, 28 November 1795 (National Archives, Kew, HO 100/55)

⁵⁴⁰ Duke of Portland to Lord Windham (British Museum, Add. MSS 37845, ff. 77), quoted in J.R. Western, 'Roman Catholics Holding Military Commissions in 1798,' *The English Historical Review*, vol. 70, no. 276 (July, 1955), pp. 428-432

The rapid augmentation of the yeomanry post-1798 made it the largest element of the Irish military establishment. When the rebellion erupted in May 1798 the official number of men enlisted in the yeomanry was 50,000, which included 15,000 cavalrymen.⁵⁴¹ However, the perceived threat of invasion, but more importantly the constant fear of rebellion, ensured that yeoman numbers continued to increase after the crisis of 1798. There was some fluctuation in numbers, mainly due to the short-lived peace treaty of Amiens, but by 1810 the yeomanry had reached its greatest strength, amounting to 85,000 effectives.⁵⁴² The greatest period of augmentation took place under Henry Addington's administration which restored only a numerically small Irish militia, but increased the yeomanry from 45,000 in 450 individual corps to 80,000 in 800 corps by 1804.⁵⁴³ However, experience during 1798 led to a change in the structure of the corps (Table 6.1). Prior to the rebellion the yeomanry consisted of a high proportion of cavalry, but these proved unsuitable against the rebel pikemen who inflicted high casualties on the mounted yeomen. The cost of maintaining such a large number of cavalrymen also proved prohibitive for the government and local gentry, ensuring that yeomanry corps was increasingly made up of infantrymen from as early as 1799. An examination of available returns provide evidence of this: in May 1798 the yeomanry corps consisted of 15,000 cavalry and 21,000 infantry; in 1799 there were 13,000 cavalrymen and 53,000 infantrymen, while by 1810 the yeomanry consisted of only 9,000 cavalry but included 71,000 infantry.⁵⁴⁴ And although the force was truly a national institution with corps being established in every county, city and major town throughout the kingdom, the largest

⁵⁴¹ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 114

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*,

⁵⁴³ Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815*, p. 167

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116

concentration of yeomen remained in Ulster which had 36,782 enlisted yeomen in 1810.⁵⁴⁵ By this time, and mainly in response to the rebellion, the yeomanry was almost exclusively Protestant, with Catholics being purged from many corps due to their perceived unreliability.⁵⁴⁶ In effect, the yeomanry had now become the established military arm of the Ascendancy who were determined to maintain control over the Catholic population.

The yeomanry became an integral part of the home defence strategy for Ireland in the years 1798 to 1815. When Cornwallis took office as commander-in-chief in 1798 he formulated a new plan for the defence of the kingdom. This involved dividing the army into five separate military districts where the available units were to be brigaded into stationary and movable forces. It was intended that these troops were to be engaged in normal garrison duties, but could be rapidly concentrated to counter any invasion force.⁵⁴⁷ The yeomanry became part of the stationary force where individual corps came together to form infantry battalions and cavalry squadrons. Cornwallis considered the yeomanry unfit for field service with regular units and intended that these formations be used to occupy strategic strongpoints, bridges, passes and supply depots.⁵⁴⁸ In the case of insurrection the yeomanry were primarily intended to defend their immediate locality in the first instance. This policy emphasized the main feature of the corps as a military force in that it had a vested interest in local defence where propertied Protestants were most likely to be the first victims of any rising.

Essentially, during the post-rebellion period, the yeomanry established itself as an important armed political force. With the militia being tainted with the

⁵⁴⁵ Abstract of Yeomanry Inspection Report, 24 March 1810 (National Archives, HO 100/155)

⁵⁴⁶ Hill, p. 1057

⁵⁴⁷ Ross, p. 298

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 73

unjustifiable reputation of being disloyal and unreliable, the government and the gentry became reliant on the yeomanry to maintain the rule of law through power and control. This was formalised through the Irish Yeomanry Act of 1802 that legalised the continuation of the yeomanry during times of peace, ensuring the Ascendancy had a permanent armed formation to protect their interests.⁵⁴⁹ This strengthened the political position of the Protestant gentry who established a greater relationship with the government through ties of patronage, political expediency and mutual interdependence. The British government became reliant on the yeomanry to maintain law and order, where the corps functioned as a deterrent and whose very existence meant a constant local armed presence. An example of this was the period from 1803 to 1805 when martial law was enforced as a result of Emmet's failed *coup*.⁵⁵⁰ However, this relationship with the government had a negative impact for Irish Catholics whose support for the union in the hope of emancipation was in vain. The political strength of the Ascendancy was maintained through the government reliance on the yeomanry, with any move to alter this balance gaining minimal support. This ensured Irish Catholics remained disenfranchised for a further two decades.

The increase in size of the yeomanry directly corresponded with the rapid growth of the Orange orders. Although initially wary of the radicalism of the various loyalist lodges, Dublin Castle had agreed to the incorporation of the societies into newly raised yeomanry corps early in 1798 prior to the rebellion when insurgent activities were becoming increasingly violent.⁵⁵¹ During the uprising and the years following the yeomanry proved to have self-discipline and were effective when defending their own property, but were often 'licentious' when attacking property of

⁵⁴⁹ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, pp. 189-190

⁵⁵⁰ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion,' p. 293

⁵⁵¹ Camden to the duke of Portland, 11 June 1798 (National Archive, HO 100/77)

others, especially Catholics and dissenters.⁵⁵² Such behaviour can be understood when examining the ethos that the Orangemen brought to the organisation. Irish society had been polarised by the violence of the 1790s leading to the rise in sectarianism. The incorporation of the Orange factions into the yeomanry further fostered the growth of loyalism and Orange traditions in the corps through memories of the Williamite wars of the 1690s.⁵⁵³ This led to the rise in 'popular loyalism' throughout the Protestant population, with the yeomanry providing an opportunity to revive the self-defence traditions that had been stifled through the abolition of the volunteer movement in 1793. Blackstock estimates that when the yeomanry reached its zenith circa 1810 the Protestant population of Ireland was approximately one million, which included 500,000 males of all ages.⁵⁵⁴ Taking into consideration that the official strength of the corps was 80,000 at this time, this indicates that one in six of Protestant males were enlisted in the yeomanry. John Cookson's estimation that one-in-three of all Protestant males fit for military service joined the yeomanry seems reasonable when considering those who would have been excluded due to age, illness and deformities, and that age structure of the time indicated that about one-third of the population was aged between 18 and 45.⁵⁵⁵ Strong social and religious links bound the yeomen through blood and kin, where the need to protect family and home determined excessive behaviour towards the perceived enemy. Attitudes had hardened from experience of the uprising, with many loyalists viewing the rebellion as a purely religious war, where victory over the Catholic peasantry was seen by some as divine intervention in securing the survival of the true faith.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵² Bartlett, 'Indiscipline and disaffection in Ireland in the 1790s,' pp. 130-131

⁵⁵³ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 273

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 271

⁵⁵⁵ Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815*, p. 167

⁵⁵⁶ Hill, pp. 1041-1043

Ultimately, the yeomanry became the military expression of the Protestant state where it symbolized the physical embodiment and security of the Ascendancy. With the denial of Catholic emancipation in 1800, which was reaffirmed throughout the Napoleonic wars and after, Dublin Castle became exclusively committed to the dominance of the Protestant population. During this era the term 'loyal' became synonymous with Protestantism and the Ascendancy, while 'disaffected' meant Catholic and disloyal.⁵⁵⁷ This could account for the significant number of ex-radical Presbyterians who enlisted in the yeomanry in the post-rebellion period to prove their allegiance to the Protestant cause.⁵⁵⁸ Loyalism was seen as support for the status quo in the dominance of church and state, and led to the emergence of a new Protestant Irish nationalism that was promoted within the yeomanry. It was such beliefs that led to the exclusion of many Catholics from the corps following the rebellion, ensuring that from 1800 the yeomanry was a nearly exclusive Protestant force. However, the British government never truly trusted the yeomanry and from 1798 it achieved greater control of the corps with the employment of brigade-majors from each county who were appointed by the lord lieutenant. This ensured that individual corps commanders were more answerable to the direction of central government, ensuring Dublin Castle controlled the para-military force at a national level. This provided the commander-in-chief of the army with more flexibility in determining its use. After the rising the function of the yeomanry changed in that the corps were now not only to be used as a local police force, but also as a reserve of light troops, permanently on duty for the duration of the war and no longer limited to service in their immediate locality.⁵⁵⁹ In effect, the yeomanry had become a permanent army, at the disposal of the Protestant oligarchy, which was readily available to counteract any perceived

⁵⁵⁷ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 298

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 299

⁵⁵⁹ Bartlett, 'Indiscipline and disaffection in Ireland in the 1790s,' p. 131

internal or external threat. The yeomanry had now evolved from a corps established for the protection of lives and property to one of defence of the Protestant state.

The poor reputation of the Irish militia was fostered by the criticism of British generals and other senior regular officers. Critics such as Abercromby, Cornwallis and Moore believed that the militia was inefficient due to nepotism, where colonels nominated mainly inexperienced relatives and close associates for commissions based on their social connections rather than ability.⁵⁶⁰ Moore recorded in a diary entry that the militia officers were ‘profligate and idle, serving for the emolument, but neither from a sense of duty nor of military distinction.’⁵⁶¹ Such criticism had some justification, although this system of patronage was an accepted practise throughout eighteenth-century British and Irish society. The poor reputation of the Irish militia determined the role of the organisation in the Irish establishment in the post-rebellion years. Prior to the uprising the 38 militia regiments formed the nucleus of an Irish army that had very few regular troops on strength and it remained the largest part of the army up until 1802, comprising an average of 53 percent of the crown forces in the kingdom between 1793 and 1802.⁵⁶² However, although the militia lacked the discipline of regular infantry units, the regiments proved loyal and performed well when led by competent officers. Official correspondence to the contrary, as well as popular anti-Irish Catholic caricatures by Gillray and Cruikshank, have been used by numerous historians to substantiate the negative view that was promoted by the Irish Ascendancy. The militia was made the ‘scape-goat’ of the few reverses that the crown forces suffered in 1798 and it was eventually superseded by the yeomanry as the main internal defence force. However, it was the perception that the militia was a solely Catholic institution that was the main reason for its eventual relegation to a recruiting

⁵⁶⁰ Brownrigg, p. 76

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Nelson, p. 248

corps for the regular army. And although those militiamen who enlisted in regular regiments were volunteers, such religious bias led to post-rebellion policies that ensured thousands of young Catholic men were either shipped off for foreign military service or posted to locations in Britain where they were considered unlikely to desert or rebel.

<i>Date of Return</i>		<i>Militia</i>	<i>Fencibles</i>	<i>Regulars</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage Militia</i>
1793	July	5,150		11,094		16,244	32
1794	Jan.	9,495		8,514		18,009	53
	July	11,967		4,134		16,101	74
1795	Jan.	13,336		6,708		20,074	67
	July	15,959		13,335		29,294	54
1796	Jan.	17,437	10,068	1,676		29,181	60
	July	18,093	8,612	1,936		28,641	63
1797	Jan.	18,132	9,141	1,906		29,179	62
	July	20,753	11,874	1,821		34,448	60
1798	Jan.	22,728	10,751	1,830		35,309	64
	July	22,930	13,247	2,380	2,516	41,073	56
1799	Jan.	22,383	12,490	2,335	14,339	51,547	43
	July	16,765	14,661	2,839	6,843	41,108	41
1800	Jan.	18,183	16,934	2,338	2,108	39,589	46
	July	16,765	15,965	8,258	2,787	43,775	38
1801	Jan.	16,473	16,368		8,259	41,100	40
	July	25,337	16,368	8,259		49,964	51
1802	Jan.	25,245	14,827	10,407		50,479	50

Table 6.2 – Irish establishment, 1793-1802

(Sources: Kilmainham Papers- National Library of Ireland; Rebellion Papers- National Archives of Ireland; Ferguson, 'Army in Ireland,' quoted in Nelson, p. 248)

Contrary to the propaganda of the Ascendancy, the militia proved to be an effective and loyal component of the Irish establishment. The constant rotation of regular regiments to and from the kingdom ensured that the government was still reliant on the militia to provide the majority of its permanently mustered infantry force throughout the years of war with France. When Cornwallis formulated his new strategy of defence for Ireland in April 1800, he was forced to include the militia in the field force due to the lack of available troops. This policy involved the creation of

a mobile force of 20,000 and a stationary force of 15,000.⁵⁶³ It was intended that the mobile force would assemble at various locations before concentrating to challenge any invasion force. The stationary force, which was to comprise primarily of the militia, supported by fencibles and yeomanry, was intended to provide local defence and garrison strategic ports and cities. However, by May 1801 the Antrim, Roscommon, Fermanagh and Londonderry regiments, predominantly Protestant in rank and file, were included with the four battalions of light infantry, formed from the light companies of various militia regiments, in the mobile force.⁵⁶⁴ From this time the militia became more effective and professional through improved drills and training. In the same year drills books were issued to all sergeants and ranks above in an effort to counteract the inadequacies that had been exposed during the rebellion. And although the militia was never to be involved in any further action after Humbert's invasion, the subsequent training received by the militiamen after 1798 ensured that the militia became a more professional military organisation than the semi-trained establishment of the early 1790s. It had to be, as the militia veterans of 1798 constituted the bulk of those that volunteered for regular service in the British army from 1800, ensuring that for a time the militia comprised largely of raw and undisciplined recruits.⁵⁶⁵

The loyalty of the Irish militia towards the crown was obvious from the large number who volunteered for long-term service in the regular army. In March 1799, less than a year after the rebellion, Cornwallis had been approached by Dundas with a proposal of procuring recruits for regular regiments from the militia due to the deficiency in the British offensive force; 'how far it is possible for your to prevail on the Irish Parliament to give us the power of recruiting into your regular

⁵⁶³ Ibid., p. 245

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ McAnally, p. 151

regiments...volunteers from the Irish militia. I understand from everybody that the men are excellent, and the defect in these militia corps arises from their being badly officered.'⁵⁶⁶ At this time Britain was desperate to replace the troops it had lost in the campaigns in the West Indies and on the continent. Dundas stated that if such a policy was followed the Irish establishment would be strengthened by having a complement of ten full-strength regular regiments, which together with the battalions of fencibles, would be of a sufficient force to counter any possible invasion, negating any reliance on either English or Irish militia.⁵⁶⁷ Cornwallis was mindful that such a move would upset the militia colonels, whose regiments would in effect be relegated to training cadres for the army. He was also wary that once line units had recruited to their full complement in Ireland that they would be immediately posted elsewhere, negating Dundas's argument of strengthening the military forces of the kingdom.⁵⁶⁸ However, there was little opposition to the proposal, ensuring that volunteers were called for from January 1800. A ceiling of 10,000 men from the militia was stipulated, with each regiment being delegated a quota based on their established full complement.⁵⁶⁹ The total number of volunteers received in this initial call was 8,138, with them being distributed amongst the nine regular regiments that were stationed in Ireland at the time. To encourage the militiamen, bounties of eight guineas were offered for general service at a time when many were due for release from service into a country that was suffering from a poor harvest and unemployment.⁵⁷⁰ Although the economic crisis may have accounted for some to enlist, there is evidence that many volunteered through loyalty to their comrades as well as the crown. Thirteen militia regiments either reached or exceeded their quota of volunteers, with many militiamen joining

⁵⁶⁶ Ross , pp. 78-79

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.,

⁵⁶⁸ McAnally, p. 150

⁵⁶⁹ Circular to general officers, 7 February 1800 (National Archives, HO 100/90/41)

⁵⁷⁰ Circular to general officers, 23 January 1800 (National Archives, HO 100/90/37)

particular regiments *en masse*; the 68th Foot was the most popular with 1,777 enlistments, the 54th received 800, the 64th gained 592, while the 13th enlisted 535.⁵⁷¹ Most of these volunteers were to see active service with Abercromby in Egypt the following year, where they were considered a superior class of recruit due to their previous military training.⁵⁷² By 1805 an average of 3,000 militiamen annually were enlisting into regular regiments.⁵⁷³ Their service and the constant demand for troops ensured that the call for recruits from the Irish militia was eventually to become an annual event during the wars with France.

The unsavoury reputation that the militia had gained from the events of 1798 ensured that many regiments wanted to prove their loyalty through service outside of Ireland. Although there was no legal authority to allow such service, some officers and enlisted men felt they could prove their questioned loyalty as part of a greater defence force. As early as 1796 individual regiments, such as the Dublin City and Queen's County militias offered to serve in England but such offers were rejected.⁵⁷⁴ From 1799 Dublin Castle received a flood of offers from regiments volunteering to serve anywhere in the British Isles, with the Queen's County Militia offering to serve on the continent.⁵⁷⁵ Such proposals are understandable when coming from the predominantly Protestant officer corps, but some written offers had either been signed by warrant officers on behalf of their men or by the rank and file themselves, who were largely Catholic in composition. Dublin Castle had also favoured such moves in June 1798 where a system of interchange of militias between England and Ireland had been argued by Castlereagh. However, the infamy of the militia resulting from the debacle at Castlebar, together with the negative response of King George III, ensured

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Nelson, p. 241

⁵⁷³ Bartlett, 'Counter-insurgency and rebellion,' p. 290

⁵⁷⁴ McAnally, p. 146

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

such measures were shelved: ‘I can by no means encourage the idea of any of the Irish militia coming to Great Britain; it would with reason offend the English militia; some going to Jersey, Guernsey, or North America might be countenanced.’⁵⁷⁶ The compromise offered by the king led to the King’s County Militia embarking in June 1799 for a one-year garrison duty in Jersey, with the Wexford Militia sailing to Guernsey for similar service in August of the same year.⁵⁷⁷ Although the king relinquished his opposition to the proposed system in 1804, it was not until 1811 that there was sufficient political support for parliament to pass an act that provided for the interchange of the English and Irish militias.

<i>Revolutionary War</i>		<i>Napoleonic War</i>	
July 1794	11,967	Jan 1804	18,639
July 1795	15,959	Jan 1805	19,423
July 1796	18,093	Jan 1806	18,750
July 1797	20,753	Jan 1807	21,473
July 1798	22,930		
July 1799	16,756 in Ireland	Jan 1811	24,733
Aug 1800	18,118	Feb 1812	14,149 in Ireland
Feb 1801	22,886	Dec 1812	12,550 in Ireland
July 1801	25,337	Dec 1813	12,901 in Ireland
Jan 1802	25,245		

Table 6.3 - Irish Militia: Rank and File Strength

(Source: Return of Effectives –State Papers office, Ireland, 620/50; Official Returns of Irish establishment- Home Office Papers: HO 100/35-102, National Archives, Kew)

The interchange system was not without controversy. John Cookson’s claim that the introduction of the interchange system formalized the ‘Britannicization’ of the Irish garrison and the military occupation of the kingdom has some merit.⁵⁷⁸ As a result of the rebellion two distinctive strains of nationalism developed in Ireland. The loyalist Protestant minority displayed their British nationalistic fervour through service in the yeomanry, while Catholic military service was firmly identified through

⁵⁷⁶ Ross, pp. 79-80

⁵⁷⁷ McAnally, pp. 147-148

⁵⁷⁸ Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815*, p. 12

enlistment in the militia and regular regiments, encouraged more by the opportunities for regular better-than-average pay, improved living conditions and adventure than any strong sense of British nationalism.⁵⁷⁹ The polarisation of the population intensified with the Ascendancy fearful of the military potential of the militia, whose association with the discontented peasantry was perceived as a continued threat. However, the Catholic population essentially remained loyal, with Catholics now concentrating on seeking representation and other rights from the British state rather than seeking any alliance with France. There was some concern from Catholic quarters that service in England would lead to Catholic militiamen being forced to attend Protestant church services, but such fears were soon abated when steps were taken for them to attend mass instead. Eventually, there were only two periods of interchange, 1811 and 1813 where a total of 29 regiments out of 38 served in Britain as part of the new system.⁵⁸⁰ Initially fourteen units were exchanged with English militia regiments in 1811, with all of these Irish corps remaining stationed in Britain until 1813. That year a second exchange was carried out where 14 Irish units transferred to Britain where they remained until late 1814 after the cessation of hostilities with France.⁵⁸¹ The Meath Militia was the only regiment to be exchanged in 1812, while nine units were never exchanged. The Irish Catholic emancipationist, Daniel O'Donnell, vigorously protested against the bill in parliament, claiming (amongst other points) that the act was a conspiracy to take away Ireland's native army and that it would lead to an annihilation of the Irish militia.⁵⁸² What gives credence to the theory of 'Britannicization' is that in 1811 when the first exchange took place, 27 English militia and Scottish fencible regiments were transferred to

⁵⁷⁹ Nelson, pp. 142-143

⁵⁸⁰ *Journal of the House of Commons*, vol. 59, pp. 645-647

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² McAnally, p. 245

Ireland compared to the 14 Irish posted to Britain.⁵⁸³ It could be argued that the large number of regiments transferred from Britain to Ireland were simply to boost the strength of the garrison at a time when there were only a few weak regular battalions in the kingdom. However, whether or not by design, such moves ensured a significant increase in the number of perceived loyal Protestant troops in Ireland at the same time that there was a dramatic decrease of Catholic soldiers in the kingdom through the combination of interchange and enlistment in regular regiments.

Prominent members of the Ascendancy, such as Castlereagh, may well have seen the interchange of militias as an opportunity for the de-Catholicization of the armed forces in Ireland, though there is no surviving correspondence that openly confirms this. Ironically, the militia was primarily seen by loyalists as a Catholic institution even though most of its officer corps, and at least a quarter of the rank and file, were Protestant. This fact has influenced the historiography surrounding the interchange system where it has been argued that it was predominantly 'Catholic' regiments that were posted out of the kingdom. The problem with this theory lies in determining what constituted a Catholic corps. There are insufficient surviving records of the Irish militia to confirm the religious composition of every regiment, with any estimation being based on the documentation regarding the composition of the light battalions and the comparison of the population of each corresponding county. However, this too may be misleading as Nelson argues that there was a tendency in some counties for a higher proportion of Protestants to enlist than the religious ratio of the population.⁵⁸⁴ What is clear is that a greater number of regiments from the Protestant stronghold of Ulster were never exchanged. These included the

⁵⁸³ *Journal of the House of Commons*, vol. 59, pp. 645-647

⁵⁸⁴ Nelson, pp. 124-125

Armagh, Cavan, Donegal and Tyrone militias, while only three regiments from provinces with high Catholic populations remained in the kingdom.⁵⁸⁵

There is evidence to suggest that decisions regarding what Irish militia regiments were to be interchanged were determined by the regiments themselves. It appears that the majority of the militiamen favoured service in Britain. Subsequent to the bill being first introduced to parliament in May 1811, the lord lieutenant submitted a list of 23 regiments that had volunteered to serve in Britain, which included 929 sergeants, 415 drummers and 16,218 other ranks.⁵⁸⁶ By the end of July 34 out of the 38 units had volunteered, with the prospect of service in England acting for example as a stimulus in recruiting for the Clare Militia.⁵⁸⁷ The act stipulated that service in Britain and Ireland was to be limited to two years, with no more than one quarter of the English militia to serve in Ireland at any one time, while no more than one third of the Irish regiments were to be posted to Britain at one time.⁵⁸⁸ This ensured that no more than fourteen Irish regiments could serve outside the kingdom at any time. Overseas service for existing personnel was to be voluntary, where they had to swear a new oath to serve faithfully in any part of the United Kingdom. It was the recommendation of the lord lieutenant that the regiments should be exchanged according to the order in which their tender of service had been received.⁵⁸⁹ This may be one reason that few Ulster regiments were exchanged, in that there were no units from that province in the first interchange. This indicates that perhaps the Ulstermen were more interested in protecting their interests in Ireland than experiencing the excitement of service abroad and that the aforementioned Ulster regiments may have been amongst the four units that declined to volunteer.

⁵⁸⁵ *Journal of the House of Commons*, vol. 59, pp. 645-647

⁵⁸⁶ McAnally, p. 245

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 244

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 245

Ireland's greatest military role in the years 1799 to 1815 was as a source of recruits for the British army. The demands of war had ensured Catholics, as well as Protestants, had been recruited from the kingdom during the Seven Years war and the American War of Independence, even though at the time it was illegal for 'Papists' to serve in His Majesty's forces.⁵⁹⁰ The repeal of the Penal laws and continued war with France ensured that Ireland was to provide Britain with a readily available supply of volunteers in the post-rebellion period. It was to this end that during this time the kingdom was to see a constant rotation of regular British regiments. Although there were numerous invasion scares in 1799, 1804, 1808 and 1811, the country was considered stable enough by the British government to allow the gradual reduction of regular troops from the Irish establishment. Britain's army was relatively small compared to those of the major continental states, with the defence of the realm traditionally falling upon the might of the Royal Navy. However, campaigns in Flanders, the West Indies, the Iberian Peninsular and North America necessitated the augmentation of the army and the constant need to provide replacements of casualties. And although the garrison of Ireland was increased to safeguard against any possible insurrection or invasion, the kingdom was to prove to be an untapped source of manpower that would eventually see 159,000 Irishmen integrated into British regiments.⁵⁹¹

An examination of official returns shows to what extent Ireland proved important to recruitment in the British army. The Irish establishment reached its greatest strength in January 1799, when there were 60,820 troops recorded in the kingdom.⁵⁹² Only 11,183 of these were regular soldiers, with the rest being either

⁵⁹⁰ Stuart Reid, *King George's Army 1740-1793: Infantry* (London, 1995), pp. 19-20

⁵⁹¹ Karsten, pp. 31-63

⁵⁹² Statement of Troops in Ireland, 1 January 1799 (National Library, Ireland, MS. 8351)

fencibles, yeomanry or militia.⁵⁹³ However, there was a decline in the size of the establishment, especially in the number of regular troops from this time. By the following year the establishment had been reduced to 50,502, with a massive reduction of regulars which then only equated to 3,976 remaining in Ireland.⁵⁹⁴ From 1800 the number of regular troops permanently stationed in Ireland remained static, while the number of line regiments sent to the kingdom increased. Viewing the disembarking and embarkation returns shows a trend that continued up to the end of hostilities with France in 1815. Most regular units sent to Ireland were seriously under-strength on arrival but within a matter of months had recruited up to a full complement. These regiments were then posted elsewhere and replaced by other 'skeleton' units where the process was repeated. An example was the two battalions of the 20th Foot, as well as the 36th Foot, that arrived in the kingdom in February 1800 and embarked the following month after reaching full strength.⁵⁹⁵ The 63rd Foot arrived in February and took four months to reach its full complement before being posted elsewhere, while the 82nd Foot arrived and left in the same month.⁵⁹⁶ What becomes clear is that most of those Irishmen recruited into these regular units came from the militia. Numerically weak British battalions were sent to Ireland at a time when the period of service for many of the militiamen was due to expire.

The offer of lucrative bounties, coupled with the promise of regular income and the chance to experience action and adventure in foreign service enticed thousands of young Irishmen to 'take the king's shilling.' Militiamen were the most preferred recruits for regular regiments as they were considered semi-trained and had

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Statement of Troops in Ireland, 1 January 1800 (National Library, Ireland, MS. 8351)

⁵⁹⁵ Disembarkation-embarkation Return, 20 September 1800 (National Archives, HO 100/92)

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

already experienced the discipline of military life.⁵⁹⁷ The success of recruiting in Ireland is obvious when comparing the strength of regiments on their arrival to when they embarked for other service; the 13th Foot had only 271 rank and file on its arrival but left with 806; the 64th disembarked with 318 and left with 910; while the most popular regiment appears to have been the 68th Foot that only had 199 men when posted to Ireland but recorded a strength of 1,976 when it was posted elsewhere.⁵⁹⁸ Another source of volunteers came from the Scottish fencibles. In July 1800 Cornwallis reported that 2,500 men from the nineteen Scottish fencible units currently stationed in Ireland had volunteered for regular service in six Scottish line regiments.⁵⁹⁹ The criticism from colonels of the militia who argued that the bounties offered by the regular regiments would prevent the militias from securing enough recruits to replace those who had volunteered or were discharged generally proved unfounded. Ironically, another notable source of recruits came from captured Irish rebels who chose to enlist rather than face execution or transportation to the prison colony at Botany Bay.⁶⁰⁰ The significance of Irish recruitment into the rank and file of the British regular regiments, especially during the campaigning years of the Peninsula War, is evident by examining the composition of the battalions; in 1809 34 percent of the 57th Foot were Irish, while in 1811 Irishmen accounted for 37 percent of the 29th Foot.⁶⁰¹ Such ratios were typical of English infantry battalions throughout the period.

Experience during 1798 ensured a change in the components of the Irish army. Most notable was the reduction of cavalry and the increased reliance on British fencibles. In a letter addressed to the duke of York in 1802 where Cornwallis outlined

⁵⁹⁷ Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion,' p. 290

⁵⁹⁸ Official Return, 19 February 1800 (National Archives, HO 100/90)

⁵⁹⁹ Cornwallis to Portland, 31 July 1800 (National Archives, HO 100/91)

⁶⁰⁰ Earl of Hardwicke to Lord Pelham, 13 May 1802 (National Archives, HO 100/102)

⁶⁰¹ Philip J. Haythornthwaite, *Wellington's Military Machine* (Tunbridge Wells, Kent, 1988), p. 24

his recommendations for the force required to successfully garrison the kingdom, he argued for less cavalry; 'there is no part of the whole island where that species of troops can act in a body...I am of the opinion that 2,500 would be sufficient for any purposes which the services of that country could require.'⁶⁰² His argument that heavy cavalry was impracticable and that only light dragoons should be employed influenced the increased reliance on the mounted corps of the yeomanry. Light cavalry were required to provide reconnaissance and intelligence, which the yeomanry with their local knowledge could provide. A second consideration in the reduction of this arm of the establishment post-1798 was the poor performance of cavalry against the rebel pikemen who caused considerable casualties when making a determined stand. The discipline and the loyalty of the 'Irish Horse' regiments, namely the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Dragoon Guards who had been a permanent feature of the establishment throughout the 18th century, was also in question due to the perceived disaffection within the ranks, leading to these formations being transferred to England in 1799.⁶⁰³ Of lesser importance was the disestablishment of the Royal Irish Artillery in 1801, when the ordnance and personnel were transferred to the Royal Artillery due to the Act of Union. With the demands for regular troops for overseas service constant, greater reliance was placed on British fencibles to provide a reliable infantry force in Ireland. This was emphasized in a letter from Pitt to Cornwallis in December 1799 when he was attempting to raise an army to attack Brest for which fencible regiments in Ireland had volunteered; 'This ...force of fencibles I think amounts to about 15,000 or 16,000 men, and would make a most valuable and important addition, but I doubt whether any large part of it could be spared from Ireland...as we could hardly trust the internal safety of that country to a small body

⁶⁰² Ross, vol. 3, pp. 488-491

⁶⁰³ Fortescue, p. 597

of regular cavalry, with Irish militia and volunteers.’⁶⁰⁴ This ensured that contrary to the composition of the establishment of the 1790s, by the end of the Napoleonic war the Irish garrison was predominantly an infantry force.

A main feature of the British response to the threat of French invasion in the post-rebellion era was the proliferation of barracks and military posts established throughout the kingdom. This came about due to the greater reliance on British fencible and militia regiments in the kingdom, ensuring a substantial increase in the number of military barracks needed to house these troops. The construction of new permanent barracks, and improvements made to existing military posts, had been occurring prior to 1798 but without urgency and not in great numbers.⁶⁰⁵ The experiences of that year heightened the fears of insurrection and invasion which resulted in a greater permanent military presence. An example was the use of fencibles and militia from 1800 to build a military road through the Wicklow Mountains, which from 1803 was to be supported by the erection of a series of fortified barracks. These strongholds were garrisoned by one hundred men and were to serve a local or regional need, as opposed to being part of a national system of defence.⁶⁰⁶ It was posts of this size and smaller that became a permanent feature of the Irish establishment. According to an Army Medical Board report, by 1804 there were 94 permanent military barracks established in the kingdom of various sizes and states of repair.⁶⁰⁷ However, a return submitted in 1811 reveals the extent to which Ireland was under military occupation: there were 106 permanent barracks that were occupied by 46,351 men; as well as 163 temporary barracks or other buildings that

⁶⁰⁴ Ross, vol. 3, pp. 154-155

⁶⁰⁵ Army Medical Board Report, January 1802 (National Archives, HO 100/108)

⁶⁰⁶ Paul M. Kerrigan, ‘The Defences of Ireland, 1793-1815,’ *An Consantoir*, vol. 34 (1974), p. 109

⁶⁰⁷ Army Medical Board Report, January 1802 (National Archives, HO 100/108)

were housing 24,073 men at the time.⁶⁰⁸ The greatest example of the military domination of Ireland can be seen by comparing this garrison of 70,424 to the Irish establishment of 1793, which had a paper strength of around 15,000 but an effective strength of much less.⁶⁰⁹ And although the Irish population were generally no longer burdened with the system of ‘free quartering’ from 1800 onwards, it was the spread of barrack building throughout the country that became the catalyst for the military occupation of the kingdom.

This included the construction of artillery batteries at strategic points such as Bantry Bay, Lough Swilly, the Shannon estuary, as well as improvements to the forts guarding the harbours at Dublin, Cork and Waterford.⁶¹⁰ Much of this work was undertaken in response to the military memorandum of the defence of Ireland submitted to the British government in 1808 by General Dumouriez, a French *émigré* who was well informed of the details of the French invasion plans of 1796 and 1798.⁶¹¹ At the same time a system of signal towers, known as ‘telegraph’ stations was introduced to provide rapid news of coastal shipping movements to the naval and military authorities, especially any which indicated a French invasion force.⁶¹² The ‘semaphore’ system of signalling with pivotal arms fixed to a vertical staff was also used to provide better communications between local forces and the high command in Dublin. These stations were prominent along the south and west coasts and were intended to be manned by ‘sea fencibles’ recruited from members of the local population who had some nautical experience.⁶¹³ A series of Martello towers were also constructed at strategic coastal points from 1804, such as Dublin, Bantry Bay and

⁶⁰⁸ ‘A return of the permanent and temporary barracks in Ireland,’ August 1811 (National Library of Ireland, Clinton Papers, MS 10217)

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Kerrigan, *Castles and Fortifications in Ireland, 1485-1945*, p. 152

⁶¹¹ Kerrigan, ‘The Defences of Ireland, 1793-1815,’ p. 109

⁶¹² Ibid., p. 225

⁶¹³ Ibid., pp. 226-227

Rosslare in an effort to hinder any landing at those locations.⁶¹⁴ Each tower generally mounted one 18 or 24 pounder cannon and with an extreme range of a mile was intended to provide mutual support to other towers or batteries in the vicinity.⁶¹⁵ A small number of towers were also constructed in the interior along the River Shannon to protect strategic crossings. Although records indicate that 74 such towers were planned, less than 50 were built, with the greatest concentration protecting Dublin.⁶¹⁶ The greater reliance on British fencible and militia regiments in the kingdom led to a substantial increase in the number of military barracks being built to house these troops.

The massive augmentation of the military forces, coupled with the establishment of 269 permanent and temporary barracks in Ireland post-1798 provide convincing evidence of the military occupation by Britain of the kingdom. Such moves would have ensured that the Irish population would be left in no doubt as to the control Britain had over the country, with the posting of troops into garrisons throughout Ireland, no matter how small, serving as a permanent reminder of that. This strategy was obviously aimed at discouraging any further armed dissent from the rebellious and disaffected elements within Irish society, and to this end it proved successful. However, such moves were also instigated to counter the growth of the yeomanry whose self-interested policing policies against the Catholic majority had the potential to inflame further rebellion. Clearly, from 1798 the British government was of the opinion that the neither the external or internal defence of Ireland could be entrusted to the Irish, whether Protestant or Catholic, and that it could only be maintained through British domination.

⁶¹⁴ Kerrigan, *Castles and Fortifications in Ireland, 1485-1945*, p. 152

⁶¹⁵ Kerrigan, 'The Defences of Ireland,' p. 149

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

By examining data relating to policies, strategies, tactics, actions and experiences of the various participating organisations and individuals who were important to the military structure of Ireland during the era 1793-1815 in a broader context, this thesis has substantiated some traditional views while challenging a number of aspects of the historiography of the period. Clearly, a close study of the Irish militia proves that its traditional poor reputation is unjustified and that it was an essential organisation in the defence of Britain. This work also introduces the concept of British military occupation of Ireland from 1798 that has largely been ignored by British historians. And although the conflicting dual roles imposed on the Irish establishment proved detrimental to training and discipline, the military forces in Ireland succeeded in quickly extinguishing the rebellion. It is clear that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries political expediency and the maintenance of professional military reputations have over-ridden the need for a more accurate account of the military history of Ireland during the turbulent and uncertain times. Until the late twentieth-century British historians have tended to accept and repeat the official versions of events promoted by the Ascendancy and British government at the time. However, the historiography surrounding the atrocities committed by all of the belligerent factions and the role of the Irish yeomanry in promoting the interests of the Ascendancy remains sound. The new Irish identity that has evolved through the creation of the Irish Republic in the 1940s has led to the emergence of a number of Irish revisionist historians whose works, concentrated on specific organisations, have exposed inconsistencies with some traditional views, particularly regarding the Irish militia and British fencibles. The conclusions of this study are a result of critical

analysis and synthesis of the traditional history and revisionist historians. What has become obvious is that the traditional account of the period had been formulated by those in power. More in-depth study of the experiences and motivation of the common Irishman to either rebel or enlist in the armed forces is required to achieve an even greater understanding of the period, but is beyond the scope of this work. What this argument does expose are some inaccuracies within the traditional historical views of Ireland and the motivations behind them.

The period 1793 to 1815 proved to be a defining period in Irish history. The relaxation of the Penal Laws towards the end of the eighteenth century saw Irish Catholic gentry reclaiming wealth and influence that was seen as a threat by the Protestant minority.⁶¹⁷ War with France amplified these fears with the arming of the Catholic peasantry through the creation of the Irish militia. The rise of the republican United Irish movement, coupled with the traditional agrarian protests of the Catholic peasantry, led to an increase in violent activity throughout the midlands and the border counties of Ulster and Leinster from 1795.⁶¹⁸ This in turn prompted the formation of the yeomanry in an effort to provide local defence, especially in areas not garrisoned by the army.⁶¹⁹ The ruthless methods promoted by some senior army officers and the government in the disaffected areas subsequently fostered an increase in support amongst the peasantry for open rebellion. The turning point proved to be in 1798 when popular insurrection and the French invasion divided the nation. Sectarianism then halted the civil advances of the Catholic majority, while the Protestant Ascendancy was able to protect their interests in the kingdom, albeit, through political union with Britain. From this time British dominance of Ireland was asserted through military occupation, characterised by the augmentation of the

⁶¹⁷ Bartlett, 'Defence, Counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793-1803,' pp. 247-249

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Blackstock, 'The Irish Yeomanry and the 1798 Rebellion,' p. 334

garrison with loyal British fencible and militia regiments, coupled with the removal of a significant portion of the Irish militia through the interchange system from 1811.⁶²⁰ The continual construction of barracks, coast defences and smaller army posts, especially after 1798, became a permanent expression of British military occupation. With the rebellion and the reverses suffered by government forces being blamed on the Catholic peasantry and militia, the Protestant oligarchy cemented the yeomanry as the defending military arm of the ruling minority, while welcoming the increased presence of British forces to minimise the perceived internal and external threats. The religious bias that was resurrected during this time was to become a permanent feature of Irish society and ultimately influenced events in Ireland up to the present time.

Clearly, Ireland was too important to the defence of Britain for it to be left in the hands of the Irish Ascendancy. The disorder within the kingdom proved an open invitation to the French who saw an opportunity to invade in an effort to de-stabilize Britain's defences. The French saw Ireland as the British did, as a weak link in Britain's chain of defence.⁶²¹ The rebellion and repeated invasion attempts provided Pitt, Dundas, Cornwallis and Castlereagh with sufficient evidence to promote British control of the kingdom through the Act of Union which had previously been universally rejected by all parties.⁶²² Once this had been achieved Britain could determine the defence strategies of Ireland that were considered insufficient while under control of the Irish parliament. It was necessary for Britain to secure control of the turbulent country to ensure that British troops were not unnecessarily drawn away from campaigns elsewhere to deal with insurgents, and that the French could not establish it as a base for expeditions to Britain. And although Pitt eventually gained sufficient support for the union from the Protestant oligarchy that was reliant on

⁶²⁰ McAnally, p. 62

⁶²¹ Come, p. 180

⁶²² Cronin, pp. 114-116

increasing British military presence to maintain its interests in Ireland, the move would ensure that Britain could weaken the political strength of the uncompromising and self-interested Ascendancy that was becoming problematic to Britain's defence strategies, which included taking advantage of the manpower resource provided by the Catholic population.

Prior to 1798 the Ascendancy had strengthened its position through political intrigue. This first came about through an outpouring of protest from influential Protestant peers and politicians regarding the liberal policies of Fitzwilliam, who as lord lieutenant, was keen to incorporate the Catholic peerage and gentry into the Irish political system.⁶²³ Such protest led to his recall in 1795 and his replacement with the earl of Camden. Camden proved to be weak, indecisive and easily manipulated, ensuring internal government directives were heavily influenced by his council of Protestant Irish peers, led by Lords Clare and Carhampton.⁶²⁴ Such men successfully argued for the formation of the yeomanry to protect their own interests, with their intention to maintain Protestant control throughout the country. Constant calls for protection from the gentry put further pressure on the beleaguered viceroy, with Ascendancy-minded and connected generals such as Carhampton, Lake and Knox eager to employ counter-terror operations against the disaffected population. Further pressure from the Ascendancy and within the army, ensured Camden failed to back the humane tactics encouraged by Abercromby, even though they proved more successful in recovering the arms of insurgents, while reducing civil unrest.⁶²⁵ Ironically, the resumption of terror tactics directed by Lake, and widely supported within the Irish parliament when he replaced Abercromby in April 1798, proved the catalyst for insurrection. Ultimately, this proved to the crown that the oppressive

⁶²³ Smith, pp. 182-185

⁶²⁴ Connelly, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, p. 308

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

policies of the Ascendancy were only promoting instability at a time when the security of the country was essential to the defence of Britain.

It was through the Act of Union that the Ascendancy maintained its dominance in Ireland. Although, politically the kingdom had been reduced to a collection of parliamentary constituencies within the Westminster parliament, the Protestant minority benefited from inclusion in the Union. The British government had chosen to appease the Ascendancy by taking into consideration its concerns regarding Catholics. The promised emancipation failed to eventuate through lack of support prior to the union and a later change to a conservative government that was more sympathetic to the Ascendancy.⁶²⁶ In effect Britain had chosen to ally itself with the Ascendancy. This is understandable when considering the longstanding social, political and religious ties that bound them. The Ascendancy was considered by many simply as Englishmen who lived and held lands in Ireland, and that their zealous loyalty would ensure Britain's best interests would be maintained there.⁶²⁷ Furthermore, the strength of the yeomanry could not be ignored and was needed to provide internal security. Britain would most certainly have been in the impossible position of having to forcibly contain this sizable corps had the British government sided with the Catholic majority once union was complete. Such considerations ensured that, apart from the loss of legislative power, the Ascendancy maintained local control within Ireland. Any political support for the Catholics was limited due to the continued questions regarding their loyalty to the Protestant crown, especially after the rebellion.⁶²⁸ However, the question of the Catholics remained an enigma in that Britain needed to encourage their loyalty to provide internal stability and utilize their military potential.

⁶²⁶ Cronin, p. 116

⁶²⁷ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, pp. 55-56

⁶²⁸ Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815*, p. 156

The fears held by the Ascendancy against Catholics in the 1790s were unfounded. Throughout the period the bishops of the Catholic Church in Ireland had actively discouraged any rebellious activity against the government as it was not under any threat from the Ascendancy.⁶²⁹ The Catholic peerage and gentry were determined to maintain and improve their circumstances, while proving their loyalty to the crown through military service either in the regular army, militia or yeomanry. The predominantly Catholic militia had proven itself to be loyal to the crown throughout the period and instrumental in dealing with the uprisings. In general, the Catholic population failed to give active support to the rebellion, essentially due to limited influence of the United Irish in many counties, and that the concept of a republic was foreign to the uneducated peasantry.⁶³⁰ This ensured that the uprisings were nothing more than isolated revolts, stimulated by local circumstances rather than a religiously motivated insurrection. The rebellion in Wexford, which although being the only county in which any significant popular support was evident, and where several Catholic priests were amongst its leaders, was mainly motivated by local issues regarding the experiences of their flock rather than religious fervour.⁶³¹ Localised economic stress and United Irish propaganda had ensured that the rebellion in the county was initially led by aggrieved members of the Protestant gentry, such as Bagenal Harvey, with support from the Catholic peasantry mainly motivated by the recent counter-terror activities of the yeomanry and militia.⁶³² One aspect of the rising in Ulster was that the rebellion there erupted without the support of the Catholic ‘Defenders’ which the United Irish leadership had been counting on to provide the majority of their forces. It appears that those Catholics that did rise up throughout the

⁶²⁹ Nelson, pp. 55-56

⁶³⁰ Foster, p. 265

⁶³¹ Dickson, pp. 215-217

⁶³² Gahan, ‘The Rebellion in South Leinster,’ pp. 109-111

kingdom, did so either in protest to the government-instigated ‘terror’ or were forced to by pressure from United Irishmen within their community or neighbours.⁶³³ The most obvious evidence of the allegiance of Irish Catholics remains the thousands who enlisted in the British army before the rebellion, and increasingly after it, with the Irish accounting for more than one third of Britain’s Napoleonic and Victorian armies.⁶³⁴

There appears to have been very little conflict between the ‘Hibernianization’ of the armed forces of the British crown and continued British rule in Ireland. The thousands of Catholic soldiers who enlisted in the militia and regular regiments during 22 years of war with France provides proof of that. The British army had been recruiting Irish Catholics, albeit illegally, since the 1750s and the removal of the Penal laws in 1793 had only legalised a practice that was already in place. Although the reasons for enlisting were many and varied, some Irish militiamen chose to enlist in line battalions as they had become accustomed to military life. The army provided the peasantry with security through regular pay, pensions, education and accommodation in an era of fluctuating economic uncertainty. Ireland proved a lucrative recruiting ground for British regiments who struggled to find sufficient replacements in England, with Irishmen equating to more than one third of the total of the duke of Wellington’s army in the Peninsular, including forty percent of the rank and file.⁶³⁵ Religious bias may have hindered promotion of Catholics in the ranks, but this may have been due more to the lack of education than bigotry.⁶³⁶ Military service was seen by the Catholic peerage and gentry as an opportunity to prove loyalty to the crown once their traditional connection with Catholic Europe ended as a result of the

⁶³³ Hewitt, pp. 104-108

⁶³⁴ Mike Chappell, *Wellington’s Peninsula Regiments: The Irish* (Oxford, 2003), p. 5

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Duke of Portland to Lord Windham (British Museum, Add. MSS 37845, ff. 77), quoted in J.R. Western, ‘Roman Catholics Holding Military Commissions in 1798,’ pp. 428-432

French Revolution; a loyalty they hoped would be repaid through emancipation that would have been unlikely under the Ascendancy. Continued British rule in the kingdom during this period was considered essential for the political improvement of the Catholic population, and thus received their support.

The Irish yeomanry remained an enigma for Britain during the war years. The para-military force was tolerated as a necessary evil due to the pressures placed on the relatively small British army. The government was dependent on the corps to provide localised internal security at a time of civil unrest, ensuring that the bulk of the army could concentrate on external defence measures.⁶³⁷ Yet the British government was fearful of the potential political power of the organisation, ensuring that it never allowed the corps to have the independence characterised in the old volunteer movement. Dublin Castle maintained a tight rein over the organisation through the authorisation of officers' commissions, the supply of arms and the allocation of pay.⁶³⁸ Measures instigated by Cornwallis after the rebellion ensured control was maintained at a local level during times of crisis through individual corps being brigaded together under the command of regular army generals allocated to each county.⁶³⁹ By doing so, the government was able to minimise the chance of further excesses which a number of the yeomanry corps had demonstrated in putting down the United Irish rising. The most compelling evidence of government lack of trust in yeomanry was the creation of the Royal Irish Constabulary shortly after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, which took over the policing roles throughout Ireland, thus marginalising the yeomanry and leading to its eventual dissolution in 1834.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁷ Morton, 'The Rise of the Yeomanry,' pp. 60-61

⁶³⁸ Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, p. 101-103

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 299

There is no doubt that the military forces in Ireland served the purposes of the British government. The militia proved essential in the suppression of the rebellion, where it provided the bulk of the forces that defeated the United Irish armies before reinforcements arrived from Britain.⁶⁴¹ Although generally lacking the discipline of regular units, as a whole, the militia proved to be a determined and loyal force that unjustifiably gained a poor reputation through magnified isolated incidents and post-rebellion Ascendancy propaganda. The historiography that has emerged regarding the corps has failed to emphasize the significance of the militia in recruitment of Irishmen into the regular army. The institution proved an essential part of Britain's defence forces in that it provided the crown with thousands of partially trained soldiers at a time when the country needed to rapidly augment its professional army. Likewise, the yeomanry proved essential as auxiliaries in providing local defence against insurgency and unrest that was endemic in Ireland during this time. Due to lack of training, militarily, the yeomanry was limited to providing a supporting role to the army by securing strategic points and conducting garrison duty to allow the release of permanent troops for offensive operations.⁶⁴² However, its importance to the government increased after 1798 as it proved significant in the policing of the kingdom. The ability to carry out civil and military functions made the corps indispensable to a government that desperately needed its regular forces elsewhere. Primarily, from 1798 the yeomanry provided the stability necessary to govern the disaffected island, and its zealous loyalism ensured Britain's continued control of the country, albeit under the supervision of the British army. The experiences of rebellion, and the attitudes reinforced by it, ensured that the Irish Protestant oligarchy and the British government were both uncomfortable that the protection of the country

⁶⁴¹ Nelson, p. 214

⁶⁴² Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army*, pp. 137-140

was reliant on the perceived ‘Catholic’ militia, which invariably led to the ‘Protestant’ yeomanry becoming the preferred armed institution of the kingdom from 1798. Likewise, the numerous fencible and militia regiments sent from Britain proved essential in providing a substantial military force in the defence of the kingdom. The quality of these troops varied, with the Scottish fencibles proving to be the most physically suitable for the counter-insurgent duties required of them.

In contrast to the early 1790s, the Irish military establishment became ‘Protestantised’ in the post-1798 period. There is no doubt that the deployment of the Irish militia to Britain from 1811 led to an increase in the number of British regiments in Ireland until 1815. However, prior to 1798 there appears to be no pattern of deployment within Ireland that would indicate any official religious bias towards ‘Catholic’ regiments by the authorities at Dublin Castle.⁶⁴³ Initially, regiments were not to garrison the county from which it recruited and were regularly transferred to various locations to prevent the troops from developing sympathies with the local populace.⁶⁴⁴ The Ascendancy was certainly fearful of having formations of armed Catholics spread throughout the kingdom. However, the dispersal of the troops into small detachments in isolated locations, coupled with the massive reduction in the number of line battalions in Ireland, generally made it impossible for the militia to be placed under the supervision of regular troops. The rotation system continued after the event of 1798, but resulted in the militia being retained as garrison troops and formed reserves, increasingly relinquishing the policing role to the yeomanry. What is evident is that after 1798 any regiment involved in any unsavoury incident with the local population was usually transferred to prevent further confrontations.

⁶⁴³ McAnally, p. 42

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 62

Clearly, the poor reputation of the Irish militia, fostered by the Ascendancy and repeated by military historians such as Fortescue, was encouraged to cover the inadequacies of the high command and government policies. The dispersal of regiments in policing roles proved counter-productive in ensuring adequate training for the newly formed units, while the tolerated absence of regimental officers to pursue personal interests ensured a lack of leadership and further hindered any unit *élan*.⁶⁴⁵ The training that the militiamen received was generally limited to musket drill and marching, with no provisions made for specific training for counter-insurgent duties.⁶⁴⁶ The dispersal policies and insufficient training played a part in the few reverses that the militia suffered in the initial stages of the rebellion, such as Ourlart Hill and Enniscorthy, where small company-sized garrisons were isolated and overwhelmed by the superior numbers of rebels. The ignominious defeat of the government forces at Castlebar by the French later in the year was squarely blamed on the lack of discipline of the 'Catholic' militia when facing the enemy, with such views being reinforced by official criticism from Cornwallis.⁶⁴⁷ However, a close analysis of available evidence indicates that such condemnation was unjustified and politically motivated. Contemporary statements from eye-witnesses, including French officers, indicate that the militia behaved admirably until the order to retreat was given by General Hutchinson which prompted a rout of the government troops at a time when the French were considering withdrawing from the field due to the stout defence of their foe.⁶⁴⁸ Hutchinson had panicked and he and General Lake officially criticised the militia to deflect the blame from themselves. In fact, part of the defeat at Castlebar was due to confusion of command caused by Hutchinson's superior, General Lake,

⁶⁴⁵ Nelson, p. 108

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 78

⁶⁴⁷ Ross, p. 308

⁶⁴⁸ Hayes, 'An Officers Account of the French Campaign in Ireland in 1798,' pp. 161-171

also being present.⁶⁴⁹ It proved politically expedient for Cornwallis to divert the blame onto the militia rather than causing further embarrassment by having the competency of his experienced senior officers questioned. Thus, the reputation of the militia remained tarnished.

Ultimately, the British successfully dealt with the situation in Ireland in 1798. Dublin Castle had made great use of the intelligence networks that had penetrated the United Irish movement. This resulted in the removal of the senior rebel leadership in Leinster, ensuring that the rebellion became a leaderless, disorganised and spontaneous revolt which was quickly defeated.⁶⁵⁰ The isolated rebel forces were easily contained by the government army, which was reinforced from Britain by the secure sea link of the Irish Sea. The rebel organisation had been seriously weakened prior to the rebellion due to the counter-terror operations, especially in Ulster, which limited the chance of success. The concentration of government forces, especially in and around Dublin, proved significant in preventing the capture of the capital which had been the main goal of the insurgents. The United Irish attempt to engage the government forces in open battle proved a fatal flaw in their strategy, with any hope of success relying on a general popular uprising throughout the kingdom combined with a sizable French invasion. If this had been accomplished the British would have been forced to fight on two fronts, seriously stretching their military resources.

The operations of the British army from 1795 up to 1798 left the Irish with historical memories of brutal repression. The ruthless counter-insurgent campaigns carried out by Carhampton and Lake prior to the rising resulted in a scale of death and destruction not seen in Ireland since Cromwell's invasion in 1649. This government-sponsored oppression only encouraged further disorder and was the catalyst for the

⁶⁴⁹ Ross, pp. 408-411

⁶⁵⁰ Pakenham, p. 217

rebellion in 1798. The excesses of the army, prompted by the commander-in-chief and influenced by the Ascendancy, on the defeated rebels and unfortunate innocent population resulted in deaths far exceeding those sustained in open conflict and has remained a stain on the reputation of the British army.⁶⁵¹ Although the post-rebellion years saw the demise of the Irish militia and the military occupation of the majority Catholic population by a zealous Protestant para-military force that was determined to maintain the Ascendancy, the increased presence of the British army in Ireland after 1798 ensured the excesses of the yeomanry were kept in check. However, the political and military circumstances dictated that the British government chose to align itself with the Protestant minority to secure its own interests. The British army, including the Irish militia and yeomanry, was used as a means to secure peace in the kingdom during a time of war when national security remained the greatest priority. Unfortunately, the tactics used only led to further division and helped establish a sectarian tradition that has permeated Irish history ever since.

⁶⁵¹ Ross, p. 355

Appendix 1. - Return of Permanent Barracks in Ireland, August 1811:
including numbers of officers and men accommodated within
(Source: Clinton Papers, MS 10217 – National Library of Ireland)

Permanent Barracks	Cavalry-Officers & Men	Infantry-Officers & Men	Permanent Barracks	Cavalry-Officers & Men	Infantry-Officers & Men
Ardglass		13	Carlisle Fort		238
Arklow		165	Camden Fort		211
Armagh		792	Haubolin battery		21
Athenry		109	Spoke Island		126
Athlone		1,486	Cove		128
Athy	64	86	Clogheen	76	
Aughavanagh		78	Dingle		84
Ballaghedenen		82	Donaghadee		21
Ballinrobe	119	157	Downpatrick		98
Ballyshannon		783	Drogheda		398
Banaghan		104	Drumgott		78
Bandon	116	1,035	Dungannon Fort		229
Belfast		1,186	Dundalk	249	739
Bellick battery		52	Dungarvan		102
Belturbet	161	324	Dunmore	74	
Boyle		289	Dunree Fort		32
Brey		67	Dunshaughlin		84
Cappoquin	38		Dublin City	827	4,031
Carlow	160	225	Enniskillen	111	549
Carrick-on-Shannon		284	Fethard	117	
Carrick-on-Suir	48	127	Fermoy	170	2,090
Cashel		333	Fork Hill		32
Castlebar	85	498	Foxford		83
Castlecomer		172	Galway		1,125
Castle Island		84	New Geneva		1,790
Cavan		594	Glencree		78
Chapelizod		385	Gort	120	
Charles Fort		576	Granard		245
Clare Castle		154	Jonesborough		42
Clonakilty		69	Kelogue		53
Clonmel	147	1,223	Kilkenny	74	828
Cork City- old barracks		712	Killough		118
Cork City- new barracks	304	3,126	Kinsale		1,429
Total	1,242	15,370		1,818	15,082

Permanent Barracks	Cavalry-Officers & Men	Infantry-Officers & Men	Permanent Barracks	Cavalry-Officers & Men	Infantry-Officers & Men
Laragh		78	Portumna	93	
Leitrim		78	Roscommon	84	389
Limerick	300	2,614	Roscrea	22	353
Longford	209	210	New Ross	40	
Loughrea	84	798	Ross Castle		87
Mallow	92	1,046	Rostrean		51
Man of War	43		Rutland		103
Meelick		33	Shannon Bridge		103
Middleton		865	Sligo	78	375
Mill Street		66	Swords		53
Monaghan	55		Tallagh	76	
Naas		169	Tralee		120
Navan	55		Tullamore	131	1,048
Naddeen		42	Waterford		596
Newry		1,168	Westport		188
Oughterrande		137	Wexford		616
Phoenix Park	45	302	Whiddy Island		267
Phillipstown	132		Youghall		445
Total	1,015	7,606		524	4,794

Barracks that could accommodate whole battalions (500 men) included:

Athlone	Galway
Belfast	New Geneva
Charles Fort	Kinsale
Cork	Limerick
Dundalk	Middleton
Dublin	Newry
Enniskillen	Waterford
Fermoy	

Total: 106 Permanent barracks accommodating 46,351 officers and men

Appendix 2. - Return of Temporary Barracks in Ireland, August 1811:
including numbers of officers and men accommodated within
(Source: Clinton Papers, MS 10217 – National Library of Ireland)

Temporary Barracks	Cavalry-Officers & Men	Infantry-Officers & Men	Temporary Barracks	Cavalry-Officers & Men	Infantry-Officers & Men
Abbeyfeale		72	Castlelacken		41
Adare		31	Celbridge		26
Aglish		31	Charleville		105
Antrim		252	Clerahan		23
Askeatow		159	Clononey		1,778
Aughnaclay		857	Coleraine		156
Ballyfernon		21	Croome		36
Balbriggan		62	Derry	98	830
Ballina		293	Drumcallaghan		31
Ballinamult		52	Dunboyne		62
Ballinasloe	350	830	Dundrum		31
Ballymena		60	Dungannon		52
Ballymore Eustace		51	Dublin-Old Custom House		622
Ballybunion		30	D- Mary St		350
Ballintobey		23	D- Abbey St		160
Ballypatrick		12	D- Henry & Sackville Sts		258
Ballinglass		100	D- Earl St		8
Bantry		426	D- St Stephen's Green	9	
Berehaven		75	D- Kenny House	327	
Bere Island		313	D- Leinster House	420	
Black Rock		32	D- Baggot St	219	
Bruff		120	D- Mespit St	83	
Bunoranna		62	D- Cork St		304
Bullivant		52	D- Portland St		6
Bunisleigh		40	D- Recruiting Depot		232
Cahir	17	842	D- Marlborough St		451
Callan	12	24	D- Cope St		8
Cappowhite		41	Eskey		44
Causeway		32	Ennnis		216
Carrickfergus		80	Enniscorthy		458

Temporary Barracks	Cavalry-Officers & Men	Infantry-Officers & Men	Temporary Barracks	Cavalry-Officers & Men	Infantry-Officers & Men
Ennistimond		52	Monkstown		309
Eyrecourt		538	Mt. Catherine	13	57
Elphin	58		Mullinahope		53
Fryarstown		27	Mocklesshill		52
Freshford		20	Michelstown		106
Garristown		31	Nenagh		638
Goldenbridge		69	New Castle, Co. Limerick		228
Gorey		94	New Castle, Co. Kildare		25
Green Castle		51	New Inn		21
Hospital, Co. Leitrim		50	Newtownbarry		190
Howth		38	New Birmingham		52
Hammondstown		21	Omagh		409
Keady		31	Palmerstown		43
Kells, Co. Tipperary		20	Parsonstown		1,040
Kenmere		—	Patrick's Well		41
Kilbiggan	154	412	Rathesole		25
Kilcock	41	77	Rathkeale		306
Kilcullen		222	Rathmullen		40
Kildare		99	Rathangan		31
Killarney		200	Skepsceene		—
Kilmanagh		14	Shanagolden	12	32
Kilmagany		12	Strabane		626
Kilrush		30	Templemore		60
Knockalla Fort		70	Tarbert		120
Killala		52	Templeodigan		25
Kilmacthomas		100	Three Mile Bridge		30
Kellinaule		80	Thurles		153
Kilmannan		14	Tipperary		258
Littlekenney		80	Trim		83
Lifford		489	Tuam		822
Lisburne	90		Tubbercorry		24
Listowel		196	Thomastown		16
Littleton		50	Tulsk		21
Magharafelt	30		Timolin		20
Maynooth	36	78	White Rock		328
Moate		371	Wicklow		89
Monasterwan		80	Urlingford		30
Mullingar		570			

Total: 163 Temporary barracks accommodating 24,073 officers and men

Grand total: 241 barracks throughout Ireland accommodating 70,424 officers and
men

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